# The Memory of God

## Hans Blumenberg's Philosophy of Religion

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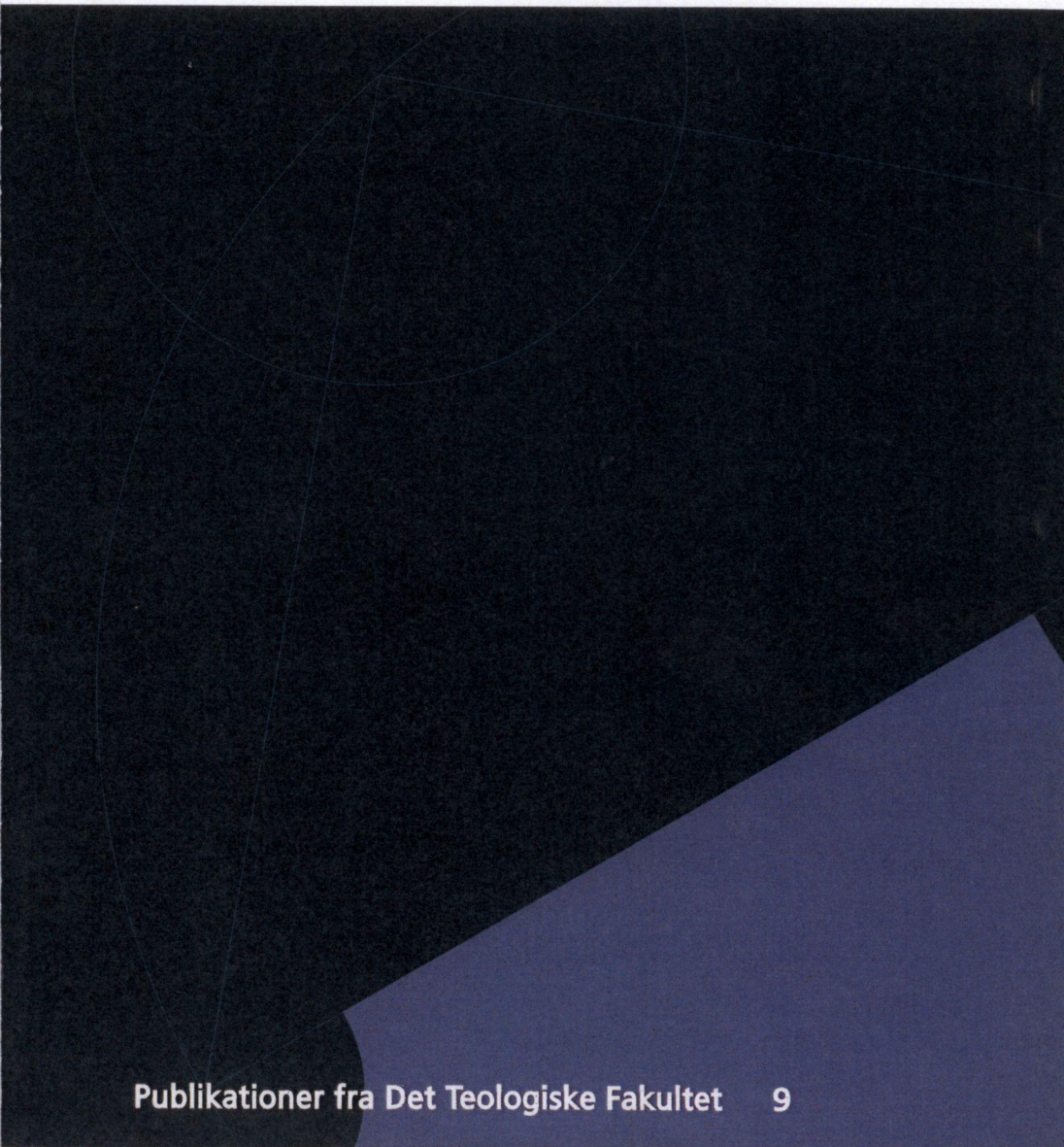

Publikationer fra Det Teologiske Fakultet 9

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## Hans Blumenberg's Philosophy of Religion

*Was ist eigentlich Aura? Ein sonderbares*
*Gespinst aus Raum und Zeit:*
*einmalige Erscheinung einer Ferne,*
*so nah sie sein mag.*
Walter Benjamin

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*Si Dieu n'existait pas*
*il faudrait l'inventer*
Voltaire[1]

**Prelude: Difficulties Remembering to Forget**

A new atheistic ice age seems to be upon us. One of the distinctive features of the so-called 'new atheism' is its ardent wish to finally forget about God: To discard the cherished illusion of God and definitively break away from the images and thoughts of the past thus seems to be the very hallmark of this new atheism. The endeavour to consign God to eternal oblivion contains, however, a conspicuous paradox. In so far as the declared intention of these atheists is to abandon *any* speech about God, it constitutes a shining example of *intended self-liquidation* (Stoellger 2003, 164): If its aim is obtained it has at the same time rendered itself superfluous. Or formulated inversely: Not until atheism has definitively disappeared will it prevail.

The possibility for which the divine name stands is still maintained by those who do not believe, Theodor W. Adorno writes in his *Negative Dialektik* (Adorno 1966, 400). Even the atheist seems to be in need of a certain idea of God in order to be able to negate it; even the atheist must form an idea of the God that he or she wants to eliminate. The dilemma therefore is that any explicit renunciation of God involuntarily maintains what it tries to get rid of (Stoellger 2003, 132). The vast number of different meanings that have traditionally been attached to the idea of God testifies to the difficulties of burying the concept once and for all. And the question remains: Can forgetting be brought about actively, through intellectual decreed?

One can no more intend to forget than one can exert oneself to relax. Having dismissed his servant of more than forty years, Martin Lampe, it is alleged that Immanuel Kant made the following diary entry: *The name Lampe now must be completely forgotten!* Kant's statement bears witness to the inherently paradoxical

[1] Voltaire, Epître à l'auteur du livre des Trois imposteurs (1768) in: Oeuvres complètes de Voltaire, (edt. Moland, L.), Garnier: Paris 1877-1885, vol. 10, p. 402.

nature of any attempt to actively promulgate a decree of oblivion. One cannot, however, disengage something just by oppressing it; one cannot forget something by reminding oneself to forget about it (Cf. EmS 207).

To summarise the problem: One may insist that we *must* forget all about God. But *can* we?

* * *

## 1. The Main Theme of this Dissertation

The aim of the present dissertation is twofold: In terms of the general thematic focus, I wish to contribute to the contemporary discussion within the philosophy of religion that could be crystallised under the heading: 'The death and (alleged) return of God'. More specifically, my intention is to rethink God through the lens of *memory*, taking the work of the German philosopher Hans Blumenberg (1920-1996) as my main point of departure; hence the title of my dissertation.

The *core hypothesis* of the dissertation is, in short, that the 'death of God' does not straight away imply that God is forgotten. Moreover, I wish to argue that *the memory of God* makes a reconsideration of God possible; a reconsideration which avoids the widespread, but misleading alternative, between 'the death of God' on the one hand, and his alleged 'return' on the other. Two overall interests thereby intersect: An *exegetical* and a *systematic*. This double interest may be expressed in the two following auxiliary claims: My *first* claim is that a particular idea of memory can be extracted from Blumenberg's wide-ranging oeuvre; my *second* claim is that this idea of memory offers promising systematic resources for a philosophical re-thinking of God "on the backstairs of the enchanted world" (H 424)[2]. In other words: Besides the attempt to qualify memory as a central theme in Blumenberg's philosophy of religion, my aim is to shed light on the systematic potentials which memory offers to a reassessment of how to think about God in an alleged 'after-metaphysical' context.

It is a basic assumption of modern hermeneutical philosophy that not all questions can be raised at all times. As Michel Foucault argues, in the foreword of *Les mots et les choses* (1966), every culture is defined by an epistemological field (*champ épistémologique*), which defines and regulates its horizon of possible questions, answers and knowledge (Cf. Foucault 1966, 11). We thus never speak from nowhere but always from somewhere; and even though we might not always know *exactly* from where we are speaking, it does not follow that we know

[2] Reference to Blumenberg's works follows the abbreviations listed in the bibliography on page 227.

nothing about it at all. Whereas a writer never controls the *reception* of his text, it is his (however doubtful) privilege to place himself in a certain *spectrum of problems*, choosing partners of dialogue and critique, and to exert a certain influence on the problems that he or she wants to confront. "The modern age is an epoch that wants to know its problems" (H 13), writes Blumenberg. Could this be because we no longer exactly know what our problems are? If that is indeed the case, philosophy of religion could perhaps be described as a certain, *context-related activity of reflection* (Dalferth 2000, 31) which tries to regain a sense of meaning for that which we appear to have lost. One influential hermeneutical way of clarifying which problems one is dealing with is to ask: What is the question to which the following is the (attempted) answer? The following points indicate the *landscape of problems* with which the present dissertation is dealing.

**1.1 The Death(s) of God**

Since Georg W. F. Hegel (1770-1831) and Friedrich W. Nietzsche (1844-1900) 'the death of God' seemingly constitutes a recurring theme in modern, Continental philosophy (Cf. Jüngel 1977, 55ff). The 'death of God' is, however, a mysterious affair. To speak about 'the Death of God' at once raises several accompanying questions. Firstly, it is not at all clear *which* God is declared dead. Blaise Pascal's (1623-1662) renowned distinction between a *philosophical* and a *biblical* understanding of God – between "the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob" and "the God of philosophers and intellectuals" (Pascal 1670, 851) – might serve as the point of departure for problematising this seemingly transparent phrase. To put it another way, it is not obvious *what* it actually *means* to say that 'God is dead'. This expression seems to demand that we somehow first define the God that dies. Rather than speaking about the death of God in the definite singular form, one should rather – following Mark C. Taylor – refer to the *deaths* of God. According to Taylor the death of God arises as the consequence of two basic but reverse understandings of God: If God is understood as the 'absolute other' he becomes identical with void and empty transcendence and eventually becomes pure absence. If God, on the other hand, is conceived as indwelling presence, i.e. as pure immanence, he too becomes a difference which eventually makes no dif-

ference: "When transcendence becomes so radical and faith so interior, the absence of the divine becomes indistinguishable from the death of God" (Taylor 2007, 199). If the death of God is conceived as the result of this *either-or*, the problem we face is to formulate an alternative understanding that escapes this dilemma.

The death of God can be translated into a phenomenological question about *distance*, i.e. about the relation between presence and absence: "God repeatedly disappears by becoming either too absent or too present" (Taylor 2007, 181). The advantage of formulating the question in terms of presence and absence is that it echoes the traditional theological question: How can God be present (*deus revelatus*) in spite of his fundamental absence (*deus absconditus*)? My intention is to show that memory permits a *balancing* between presence and absence that might avoid this abstract 'either-or' by giving room for a *dialectical* understanding of absence and presence. The aim is to produce an understanding of memory which allows us to formulate an idea of God which is somewhere *between* (absolute) presence and (absolute) absence. God is *neither* present like a thing *nor* absent like nothing. God is *neither-neither-nor-nor*. But in which sense does memory constitute a fruitful category of interpretation with regard to the question of God? What *is* memory?

### 1.2 Forming a Concept about Memory

Following Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's programmatic statement that philosophy is the art of inventing or fabricating concepts (*la philosophie c'est l'art de former, d'inventer, de fabriquer des concepts*) (Deleuze/Guattari 1991, 8) our task is to form a concept of memory.[3] This is not, however, a particularly easy task. First of all, we are confronted with the dilemma that memory cannot be observed directly – even though it is always somehow present whenever we observe. We do not simply have memory at our disposal; memory is not an avail-

[3] A short terminological remark: Blumenberg generally speaks about *Erinnerung*; I use the word memory and/or remembrance throughout the dissertation (and not re-collection or re-calling). For the problems related to English translations of German key terms in regard to memory see Lotz 2004, 124.

able object like a table leg or a bagpipe. The fact that we have different *metaphors of memory* – memory as a writing pad, as a spacious palace, as a book, as a photographic plate, as a mirror, as a trace etc. (Cf. Draaisma 1995) – suggests that what memory *is*, is fundamentally due to an interpretation. To *define* memory suffers from similar obstacles. In the very end of his *Philosophical Investigations* (1953) Ludwig Wittgenstein pointed to the peculiar circularity involved in any attempt to define memory through the past. Wittgenstein thus imagines somebody who for the first time in his life remembers something and says: "Ja, jetzt weiß ich, was 'Erinnern' ist, wie erinnern *tut*". But how does he know that this feeling is 'to remember'? Because the feeling is related to something past? But from where, if not through memory, do we learn about the past? (Wittgenstein 1953, 543; Cf. SZ 143). Despite these difficulties, my suggestion would be to understand memory as an *activity of its own*: Memory is a (human) capacity or power which – in the language of phenomenology – makes *imaginative variations* of the past possible. The past is not simply that which *has been* and never comes back. Rather, it dwells in the memory of the *possible*, of that which c*ould have been*. As Ricœur states:

> (…) the past is not only what is bygone – that which has taken place and can no longer be changed – it also lives in the memory thanks to arrows of futurity which have not been fired or whose trajectory has been interrupted. The unfulfilled future of the past forms perhaps the richest part of tradition (Ricœur 1996, 8)

Inspired by Nietzsche's idea about the plasticity of forgetting (Cf. Nietzsche 1874, 212-213), I will argue that memory may fruitfully be described by means of the same metaphor: It is the *plasticity of memory* which animates the sense for that which *could have been* by unfreezing the solid factuality of the past and thereby releasing new, alternative possibilities. In short: Memory is not just a conserving capacity but also functions as a medium for imaginative variations of the remembered. And my claim is that it is the (plastic) memory of God, which makes God present *despite* his absence.

Blumenberg relates his considerations to Husserl's extensive phenomenological analyses of consciousness by *expanding* and *transforming* them into a more general theory about history and memory. What Blumenberg refers to as a 'phenomenology of history' (*Phänomenologie der Geschichte*) can be considered as different attempts to convey the conceptual universe of phenomenology – especially Husserl's ideas of intentionality, inner time consciousness, the idea of free variation, distance and presence – onto history itself (Behrenberg 1994, 1). One of the guiding theses of the present dissertation is that memory is not simply identical with a passive reproduction of the past but is an active and productive capacity, which varies what is remembered thereby releasing new 'spaces of meaning'. In short, memory strikes an alliance with human *imagination*. The role of memory is, however, fundamentally ambiguous: On the one hand memory seems to be decisive to our comprehension of what we experience as real. Memory in itself constitutes a binding form of reality. On the other hand, however, memory always seems to already be somehow converted into imagination. Memory hinges on imagination and does not seem to know of naked, incontestable facts. Memory, therefore, is identical with a continuous 'work of interpretation':

> Die Erinnerung insistiert nicht auf dem, was wirklich gewesen, sondern verwandelt das vermeintlich Versinken der Vergangenheit mit den Ungenauigkeiten ihrer Wiederholung in die ästhetisch-historische Arbeit der Zeit (H 423)

Memory is both preserving and productive; it both maintains the past and changes it. The *interpretative* and *imaginative* aspects of memory might be said to be a result of its *inaccuracy*. The inaccuracy of memory should, however, not be conceived of as a lack or deficit. Rather, this inaccuracy is an unavoidable *phenomenological* consequence of the perspectivity of human consciousness and thus related to the intentional structure of human understanding (Moxter 1999, 196). Our memory provides us with "the wonderful inaccuracies" that allows for a "free variation" (H 557) of our past. It is exactly this inaccuracy of what we remember, which enables us to change and vary the past and thereby to speak of

the plastic dimensions of memory. What makes the key word *memory* such a rich philosophical category of interpretation is exactly that it draws attention not only to 'that which happened' but also thematises "was religiös der Fall ist, im Horizont *möglicher Alternativen* und *alternativer Möglichkeiten*" (Dalferth 2000, 41). Memory allows for a free variation and a 'playing through' of the possibilities of the actual in as much as it combines different religious expressions and motifs, exploring their underlying 'spaces of possibility' (Dalferth 2003, 157).

**2. Linking the Question of God with Blumenberg's Metaphorology**

A remarkable way of once again "changing what has actually happened into possibility" (VdN 91) can be found in Blumenberg's so-called *metaphorology*. Blumenberg tries, in very different and wide-ranging studies of Western intellectual history, to point out the vast richness of the past by re-opening its unfolded possibilities. Moreover, Blumenberg's metaphorology contains an appeal not to make the present the sole parameter of the past. The past has the right to be remembered and should not simply fade into oblivion. This duty to remember is not, however, equal to an obsolete work of archiving a remote and dusty past. Rather, the main concern is to re-open the past by taking its unfolded possibilities into reconsideration and examining what also could have been possible. Or, as Blumenberg puts it in an article from 1954 discussing the concept of God in Kant, the crucial issue of his metaphorology is "(...) in das Dunkel dessen tiefer einzudringen, was für uns noch Möglichkeit sein mag. Ob die Wiederkehr Gottes zu diesen uns aufbehaltenen Möglichkeiten gehört, ist dabei eine der drängenden Fragen, die uns zur Erhellung unserer geschichtlichen Herkunft bewegen" (KF 554). To shed light on our historical past not only involves a reconstruction of what has been; it also involves a consideration of the possibilities which were never voiced. Not only do we live in the wake of the *insights* of our past; its *expectations* also shape our outlook and form our 'world view'. Disappointments, regrets, expectations and conjectures also form 'who we are'. This eventually means that Blumenberg's metaphorological approach to God can be translated into the following questions: *Which God did we think we could have? Which God did we hope for?* These questions represent the underlying *Leitfragen* in

Blumenberg's phenomenology of history and thus function as the implicit thematic horizon for his reconsiderations of God.

Odo Marquard has characterized Blumenberg's writings as nail-bitingly exciting "Problemkrimis" (Marquard 1999, 22). This criminalistic characterisation is telling in so far that it brings the *metaphor of trace* into play thereby enouncing something about Blumenberg's distinctive philosophical method (Cf. Stoellger 2000, 158): Just like a criminal detective cannot in advance know exactly where to look after significant traces from a crime, Blumenberg's writings are also marked by a noteworthy methodical openness, or, as I would prefer calling it, a *methodological agnosticism* in relation to the traces of the past. His "text galaxies" (Brague 1995, 173) testify to an exceptional interest in even the most remote, marginalised and seemingly obsolete thoughts and ideas of the past, giving considerable attention to even the smallest 'particles of significance' in the history of Western thought (Behrenberg 1994, 1). The attention span in Blumenberg's writings is astonishingly vast and documents an almost encyclopaedic scholarly expertise. But more or less all Blumenberg's galaxies or worlds of thought display an *indirect thematic concern* with the question of God (Stoellger 2003, 160). This (more or less explicit) thematic presence of the question of God is, I think, what qualifies his thinking as a philosophy of religion. Blumenberg's openness to theology is, however, far from any apologetic agenda and does not constitute a dogmatic safeguarding of a particular idea of God. Rather, Blumenberg's writings find themselves *beyond* the somewhat sterile alternative between atheism and theism.

## 2. Hermeneutical and Methodological Considerations

In what follows I will attempt to clarify and shed light on the methodological presuppositions of the present dissertation. It will become clear that the present dissertation extends notable sympathy to *hermeneutical* and *phenomenological* approaches. This methodological sympathy seems to be well-directed since philosophy of religion itself can be considered, above all, an interpretative activity which has to do with the *understanding* of the symbolic and cultural achievements of man. However, some elaboration will be necessary.

## 2.1 Philosophy as a Conceptual Enterprise

Philosophy is essentially a conceptual enterprise. This, of course, is in no way a particularly original or conspicuous announcement, even though it sometimes seems to be deplorably overlooked. In a certain sense, philosophy *is* identical with its conceptual formations. Concepts ("Begriffe") are both the condition for *as well as* the result of a comprehension ("Be-greifen" literally: a catching or grasping; lat.: *conceptio*). But where in most cases there is a matter 'outside', that has to be conceived, the 'matter' of philosophy is intimately connected with its 'grasping organ' itself, i.e. its conceptual formations (Hass 1989, 76f).

This does *not* mean that philosophy has no connection with reality itself or that there necessarily exists an unbridgeable gulf between 'subject' and 'object'. In fact, the alleged '*rendezvous*-trouble' between 'concept' and 'reality' rather seems, as Heidegger has pointed out, to be a pseudo-problem (Cf. Heidegger 1927, 203; 205). What it *does* mean, however, is that what reality 'is' and how it is understood, intimately connects with the concepts – i.e. the conceptual frameworks – through which it is conceived. To say that we "have no other reality than the one we have interpreted" (WM 63/AM 72) does not imply that all interpretations of reality are equally good or convincing. But, to declare an interpretation 'good' or 'convincing' does presuppose an interpretation of what 'good' and 'convincing' means. Concepts are not only derived from and formed by objects; they also inform objects: "Begriffe beruhen nicht nur auf Gegenständen, sondern Begriffe konstituieren auch Gegenstände" (TdU 40).

Reinhart Koselleck, one of the foremost exponents and practitioners of conceptual history, has suggested that historical studies should focus on the invention and development of the fundamental concepts underlying and informing a distinctively historical manner of our understanding of the world. In this sense some concepts can be claimed to possess a prominent significance for the understanding of a given epoch. While Koselleck speaks of different "layers of time" (*Zeitschichten*), Blumenberg has claimed that some concepts seem to have the same significance for a historical formation as a fossil possesses for a geological one (Cf. SB 144). Conceptual history, however, should not be confused with an antiquated doxographic work of conservation. Rather, its main target is to *re-*

*actualize* the potentials of the past by freeing our thinking from its mute, teeth-chattering existence in the sterile cooling box of scientism. Hence, conceptual history is, one could say, a vaccine against conceptual *rigor mortis*. Or to express the matter with Blumenberg: We do not need to reflect so thoroughly on our tradition because we *have* the same problems as our predecessor but rather because our problems would *not have been* the same if they had not been formed by the questions and answers of our predecessor (Cf. EmS 90).

*Religionsphilosophie entsteht*
*wenn Gott nicht mehr gut*
*gedacht werden kann*
W. Jaeschke[4]

**2.2 Philosophy of Religion**

Philosophy of religion is neither religious philosophy nor a philosophical religion (Dalferth 2000, 46). Philosophy of religion is a conceptual enterprise that deals with the possibility of *thinking about* religion. In this sense, philosophy of religion, as Jaeschke suggests, can be considered a specific modern activity of reflection that reflects the loss of self-evidence in relation to our understanding of God. Moreover, philosophy of religion is confronted with a demand to (in the words of Hegel) "apprehended its time in thoughts" (Hegel 1821, 26). To bring our time into philosophical consideration to a certain extent implies the creation of new categories of interpretation which – *in casu* – allow for a reconsideration of God. Moreover, philosophy does not aim at the production of absolute solutions or undeniable answers; rather, it has to do with reflection. In this sense philosophy can be said to fulfil its function not above or before but *after* the sciences (BM 482). Blumenberg refers to his philosophy as *Nachdenklichkeit*, a word which emphasises the 'coming-after'; philosophy as after-thought. This understanding of philosophy is, I think, in agreement with Michael Theunissen's thoughts on the possibilities of philosophising under the present, i.e. "after-metaphysical"[5]

[4] Jaeschke: 2006, p.1

[5] The German word 'nach-metaphysisch' is most commonly rendered into English as 'post-metaphysical'. I have chosen, however, to use the expression 'after-metaphysical'

circumstances (Cf. Theunissen 1989). Here he describes present philosophy not only as an after-metaphysical work of reflection but also points to the obligation to remember our "geistigen Herkunftsgeschichte" and emphasizes "die Nachträglichkeit philosophischen Denkens" (Theunissen 1989, 24). On the one hand philosophy is thrown upon its inescapable historical conditions and thus committed to attach itself – through a kind of 'hypolectic galianism'[6] – to tradition; on the other hand it *also* aims at performing menacing interpretational bungee-jumps without any pre-secured "Zielerreichungsgarantie" (LW 22). A philosophical claim is, Blumenberg writes, valid

> (…) in dem schwach definierten Sinne, daß sie weder bewiesen noch widerlegt werden kann. Philosophie ist der Inbegriff von unbeweisbaren und unwiderlegbaren Behauptungen, die unter dem Gesichtspunkt ihrer Leistungsfähigkeit ausgewählt worden sind. Sie sind dann auch nichts anderes als Hypothesen, mit dem Unterschied, daß sie keine Anweisungen für mögliche Experimente oder Observationen enthalten (…) (H 22)

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throughout this dissertation in order to emphasize a particular meaning: Blumenberg's philosophy is characterised by Nach-denken (literally: a thinking-after), that is, a memorial re-thinking which 'comes after' the metaphysical tradition (both in the sense of being in pursuit of something and coming after it). I don't think the term 'post-metaphysical' catches this point as well as 'after-metaphysical'. For a more detailed discussion of this concept see Part I, chapter 3.3 (After-Metaphysical Considerations: Blumenberg's Nachdenken).

[6] This curious formulaic expression is an idiosyncratic compilation of two designations used by Joachim Ritter and Odo Marquard to describe our basic hermeneutical situation: "Hypolepsis" signifies that our thinking is always thrown upon and bound to (incontrollable) pre-understandings, i.e. attached to pre-given circumstances and conditions (Cf. Ritter's article "Hypolepsis" in: Historiches Wörterbuch der Philosophie, bd. 3, p. 1252-1254) and 'galina' is the Latin word for 'hen' used in contrast with 'ovo', or 'egg'. Marquard writes: "Denn wir Menschen sind stets Spätgeborene; wo wir anfangen ist nicht der Anfang: wir fangen nicht ab ovo an, sondern a galina (als Hermeneutiker, das bemerken Sie, bin ich bei der Frage nach Henne end Ei kein Ovist, sondern Galinist)" (Marquard 1991, p. 48).

Philosophy is *hypothetical* without any strict *demonstrability*; it is concerned with interpretative *suggestions* which cannot be definitively proven or rejected, only made more or less *plausible* (Cf. Wetz 1993, 162). Since memory is characterised by both having a preserving and an imaginative or creative dimension, I suggest understanding Blumenberg's philosophy as an *after-metaphysical work of memory*. The language of philosophy could perhaps aptly be characterized as "controlled ambiguity" (*kontrollierte Mehrdeutigkeit*) (SP 143). It is the endeavour to speak unambiguously and precisely in a 'language-situation' that is essentially ambiguous and evasive and therefore constantly undermining this effort itself. Philosophy of religion is, as Dalferth has emphasised, not (primarily) concerned with the anthropological, psychological, historical or sociological *description* of different religions and religious matters; it has to do with an enquiry into the not-realised possibilities of religion, i.e. the possibilities that were not – or still have not been – brought into being (Cf. Dalferth 2003, VI). Philosophy of religion – and this is the underlying methodological claim of the present work – is concerned with the *potential relevance*, i.e. the *possible* meaning or significance of God. Finally, lets us survey the architecture of this dissertation.

### 3. The Architecture of the Dissertation

The dissertation has three parts. The *first part* gives an account of the phenomenological and theoretical background to Blumenberg's metaphorology. As a phenomenology of history, Blumenberg's metaphorology must be seen as work on metaphors which stands in a specific relation to metaphysics. I suggest describing this relation as an after-metaphysical work of memory. This after-metaphysical work of memory finds itself lodged *between* competing impulses: To leave metaphysics, to continue with metaphysics. The *second part* is dedicated to Blumenberg's studies of the (genesis of) the modern age, in particular the relation between the death of God and the rise of modernity. Blumenberg's studies of the modern age seem to be guided by the question: Which God did we think we could have? I argue that Blumenberg's studies of modernity may fruitfully be interpreted as a backward-turned work of memory, a work which is not only concerned with the factual course of events but also addresses the imagina-

tive question: What could have been? Finally, the *third part* deals with more systematic questions related to the memory of God. Besides dealing with Blumenberg's philosophy of religion, I here confront his ideas with 'foreign' lines of reflections – Nietzsche and Hegel in particular. My attempt is to clarify the way that 'the memory of God' can be said to hold systematic resources for a rethinking of God.

The structure of my thesis may be summarised as follows:

**Part I**

*i)* *Metaphorology as a Work on Metaphors*

*ii)* *Phenomenology of History as an After-Metaphysical Work of Memory*

**Part II**

*i)* *Leave-taking with God*

*ii)* *Which God did We Think We Could Have?*

**Part III**

*i)* *The Death of God Revised*

*ii)* *The Memory of God*

# Part I
# Blumenberg's Metaphorology

## 1. Work on Metaphors

The term 'metaphorology' immediately awakens the expectation that we are dealing with yet another, one is tempted to say, theory of metaphors. Since the 1960s there has been an almost infectious interest in this subject within the philosophical community: Max Black (*Models and Metaphors* (1962)), Paul Ricœur (*La métaphore vive* (1975)), Donald Davidson (*What Metaphors Mean* (1978)), Lakoff-Johnson (*Metaphors we live by* (1980)) – just to name a few – all testify to this recent fascination with metaphor. As early as 1978 Wayne Booth reflected, with no little wit, on the magnetic charm of metaphor in the academic world: "I have in fact extrapolated with my pocket calculator to the year 2039; at the point there will be more students of metaphor than people" (Booth 1978, 49).

On the face of it, it would be no surprise to find Blumenberg's metaphorology classified as the German *pendant* to this general philosophical turn towards the theoretical field of metaphor. Anyone acquainted with the details of his work will, however, be struck by Blumenberg's remarkably reticent treatment of the subject. None of the aforementioned heavyweights in the field receive attention what so ever by Blumenberg; even the ambition to answer what could reasonably be characterised as one of the fundamental questions of any 'metaphorology' – namely: 'what is a metaphor?' – is passed over in conspicuous silence by Blumenberg. Thus, the almost total absence of systematically elaborated assertions on metaphors – in short: the absence of any regular theory in which to ground metaphor in Blumenberg's numerous writings – leaves the reader in a peculiarly uncomfortable situation: If Blumenberg's metaphorology is not a *theory on* metaphors (Sommer 2006, 57), then what is it?

One could fruitfully approach Blumenberg's metaphorology by referring to the title of one of his major works, *Work on Myth*. Blumenberg's metaphorology

namely seems to be, in the striking words of Kasper Lysemose, "a work *on* metaphors *by means of* metaphors" (Lysemose 2006, 109). The ground-breaking news in Blumenberg's metaphorology is not the formulation of a surprisingly original *definition* of metaphors (Recki 1999, 152); nor is it primarily the philosophical rehabilitation of metaphors as such that provides it with its original character. The innovative character of Blumenberg's metaphorology rather manifests itself in two distinctions: Partly in its fundamental *anthropological* foundation, partly in the unique *way* in which Blumenberg deals with metaphors. On the one hand, Blumenberg's metaphorology is characterised by the placing of metaphor within a framework of what Blumenberg refers to as a *phenomenological anthropology* (AAR, 116; ZdS 318). On the other hand, it finds its uniqueness in the very *mode of articulation*, i.e. in the (often metaphorical) way in which metaphors are dealt with. In this light, Blumenberg's philosophical endeavour can reasonably be said to be a continuous *work on* (rather than a theory to explain) the questions and answers 'enclosed' in metaphors or, more generally speaking, in the vast spectrum of human cultural forms (Cf. Hundeck 2000, 94).

### 1.1 Paradigms of a Metaphorology

That Blumenberg's metaphorology is not (primarily) a theory *on* metaphors is disclosed in the very title of one of his works: *Paradigmen zu einer Metaphorologie* (1960). A paradigm is, grammatically speaking, an example of a conjugation or declension showing a word in (all) its inflectional forms. And that is exactly what Blumenberg seems to be concerned with in his *Paradigmen*: Playing through or 'conjugating' different metaphors in their historical range of variation – metaphors like 'truth' as 'powerfulness' (23-48) and 'nakedness' (62-76), 'terra incognita and the 'unfinished universe' (78-90) as metaphors for 'attitudes towards the world' in modernity, 'metaphorised cosmology' (142-165) etc. This first of all suggests that metaphorology is conceived as a decidedly *historical* enterprise concerned with the 'pre-systematic' underground of history: That which lies more or less unarticulated beneath the surface of history. We return to this in a moment. But first we must deal with an important distinction introduced by Blumenberg.

He divides metaphors into two basic groups (PM 10): Either metaphors are 'residues' (*Restbestände*) or they constitute 'basic inventories' (*Grundbestände*) of philosophical language. In the first case, metaphors are rudiments which have *not yet* been translated into purely rational concepts, that is, figurative survivals of a historical past which have so far not been converted into conceptual clarity, but *ideally* can be so. As residues these metaphors thus seem to fall under the 'regulative ideal' echoed e.g. in René Descartes' (1596-1650) *Regulae* (1628): "(…) si les philosophes s'entendaient toujours sur le sens des termes, on verrait disparaître presque toutes leurs controversies" (Descartes 1628, 162). Francis Bacon's (1561-1626) idols of the mind (introduced in his *Novum Organum* (1620)), particularly the *idola fori*, might also count as an historical example of this idea of betraying metaphorical 'left-overs' that breed fallacies and erroneous belief. Such metaphorical residues are, however, not the primary target of Blumenberg's metaphorology. Rather, the target is a particular type of metaphors that Blumenberg refer to as *absolute* (PM 10).

If such absolute metaphors can indeed be shown to exist (Blumenberg consistently speaks *hypothetically* about them at this point), they must be characterised by having a non-dissoluble significance, and i.e. they must resist transference into definitive conceptual definition. The presumption that such absolute metaphors can in fact be demonstrated to be present in the course of history is, in a sense, made plausible by means of inverse argumentation: Imagine, Blumenberg requests, that Descartes methodological programme in his *Discourse* (1637) where in fact carried into effect; then philosophical language would be thoroughly conceptual in a strict and rigorous mathematical fashion.[7] It would be a

[7] Already in his very first publication, a short article entitled *Die sprachliche Wirklichkeit der Philosophie* (sW) from 1946, Blumenberg refers to Husserl's philosophical ambition articulated in his polemic pamphlet, *Philsophie als strenge Wissenschaft* from 1911. Here Husserl expresses his phenomenological dream of "eine endgültigen Fixierung der wissenschaftliche Sprache" which presupposes "die vollendete Analyse der Phänomene" and admittedly is a goal "das in grauen ferne liegt" (Husserl 1911, 27). As Blumenberg remarks, however, the striking thing about Husserl's formulation is the self-confidence and certainty with which this ideal is maintained *despite* its remote and grey prospects of succes (sW 431).

situation in which the following would be true: "alles *kann* definiert werden, also *muss* auch alles definiert werden, es gibt nichts logisch 'Vorläufiges' mehr, so wie es die *morale provisoire* nicht mehr gibt" (PM 7). Would it then be a situation like the one Wittgenstein refers to in the *Tractatus* (1921); a situation in which there would be no more questions to ask? As Blumenberg remarks, the situation after "all possible scientific questions have been answered" is, strangely enough, a situation in "which one still speaks in the manner of not-answering and where this not-answering is the only possible treatment of the problems of life that remain" (TdU 103): "Of course there are then no questions left, and this itself is the answer" (Wittgenstein 1921, 82).

Blumenberg's metaphorology is the tacit answer to the impossibility of remaining silent in regard to those questions that we do not know how to answer scientifically, but even so cannot simply give up. His presumption is that absolute metaphors are the carriers of such theoretically 'unanswerable' questions. Metaphorology is, in Blumenberg's own words, an attempt "Aspekte – vielleicht neue Aspekte – des geschichtlichen Sich-verstehens der Philosophie zu gewinnen und zu differenzieren" (PM 111).

### 1.2 The Anthropological Foundations of Metaphors

In a famous passage from his unpublished manuscript, *Über Wahrheit und Lüge im Aussermoralischen Sinn* (1873), Nietzsche refers to what he calls "the drive toward the formation of metaphors (*Trieb zur Metaphernbildung*)" a fundamental human drive which one "keinen Augenblick wegrechen kann, weil man damit den Mensch selbst wegrechnen würde (…)" (Nietzsche 1873, 319). Nietzsche here suggests a fundamental relation between human beings and the formation of metaphors. It is, one could say, a claim about the fundamental metaphorical 'nature' of human beings or rather; it is a claim about the elementary *anthropological foundation* of metaphors. Human beings 'inhabit' worlds of metaphors (*Metapherwelten*); but they constantly tend to *forget* that these worlds are in fact metaphors.

Nietzsche's overall interest is to critically attack the idea and alleged value of truth. In a passage no less famous than the one cited above, Nietzsche declares

truth a 'moveable host of metaphors' (Nietzsche 1873, 314). Taken in full, the passage reads:

> Was ist also Wahrheit? Ein bewegliches Heer von Metaphern, Metonymien, Anthropomorphismen, kurz eine Summe von menschlichen Relationen, die, poetisch und rhetorisch gesteigert, übertragen, geschmückt wurden und die nach langem Gebrauch einem Volke fest, kanonisch und verbindlich dünken: die Wahrheiten sind Illusionen von denen man vergessen hat, dass sie welche sind, Metaphern die abgenutzt und sinnlich kraftlos geworden sind, Münzen, die ihr Bild verloren haben und nun als Metall, nicht mehr Münzen, in Betracht kommen (Nietzsche 1873, 314)

It may be that humans are "das noch nicht festgestellte Tier", but Nietzsche nonetheless seems to suggest that *metaphoricity* is constitutive of this still unfixed animal. Blumenberg seems to share this anthropological commitment.

Odo Marquard has suggested understanding Blumenberg's anthropology as follows: "Die Menschen halten das Absolute nicht aus. Sie müssen – in verschiedenster Form – Distanz zu ihm gewinnen (…) Das Lebenspensum der Menschen ist die Entlastung vom Absoluten, die Kultur als Arbeit an der Distanz" (Marquard 1999, 20). Marquard here seems to locate two guiding motives in Blumenberg's thinking: On the one hand the idea of (different forms of) *absolutism* (whether 'God', 'reality', 'truth', 'expectations' etc.). On the other hand the idea of (different forms of) *human distance-making* in relation to these forms of absolutism. According to Marquard, the 'need for relief from the absolute' (*Entlastung vom Absoluten*) thus constitutes the basic anthropological motive in Blumenberg's thinking. This basically means that Blumenberg, in Marquard's interpretation, subscribes to a compensatory anthropology which has its background in Arnold Gehlen's (1904-1976) idea of human beings as *Mängelwesen*, that is, as 'creatures of deficiencies'. Even though this characterisation cannot be claimed to be outright false (Blumenberg does indeed operate with the idea that human beings lack natural dispositions, that they are by nature instinctively poor and that the *animal symbolicum* therefore only "masters the lethal reality by letting it be represented 'rhetorically'" (AAR 116)), it is undeniably rather one-

sided (Cf. Hundeck 2000, 59; Stoellger 2000, 487). Even though Blumenberg suggests a relation between metaphor and deficiency it must be noted that he sees this deficiency or lack 'repaired' by surplus funds (*Fundus eines Überschusses*):

> Die Metapher (…) zeigt auf anthropologischen Mangel und entspricht in ihrer Funktion einer Anthropologie des Mängelwesens. Aber sie behebt den Mangel aus dem Fundus eines Überschusses, aus der Ausschweifung über den Horizont des Lebensnotwendigen hinweg, insofern dieser Horizont Möglichkeit und Wirklichkeit trennt (TdU 88)

Metaphor functions as an instrument by means of which our relation to the world is expanded; it is an organ to reach the territories which lie beyond our bare biological indigence (TdU 89). The centrifugal dynamics of metaphor calls new and unknown possibilities into being and thereby reflect human freedom. Similarly, 'distance' is not merely a result of human deficiency and lack. It also constitutes, as Blumenberg explains, an initial advantage in regard to other organic systems. The ability to establish distance to reality, that is "die Wirklichkeit nicht unbedingtes Signal der programmierten Verhaltensreaktionen sein zu lassen" constitutes "der Vorsprung gegenüber allen anderen organischen Systemen, den der Mensch gewonnen hat" (BM 628). When Wetz and Timm therefore claim that the cultural resources of human beings "weniger Ausdrucksformen seines schöpferischen Reichtums als vielmehr Armutszeugnisse seines notvollen Daseins [sind]" (Wetz/Timm 1999, 9), they seem to pass over in silence the approaches to an 'anthropology of richness' that is *also* present in Blumenberg's writings. Blumenberg touches on this anthropological alternative in the opening words of his essay *Anthropologische Annäherung an die Aktualität der Rhetorik* (first published in Italy in 1971):

> Was der Mensch ist, wurde in zahllosen definitionsähnlichen Bestimmungsversuchen auf Sätze gebracht. Die Spielarten dessen, was man Heute Philosophische Anthropologie nennt, lassen sich auf *eine* Alternative reduzieren: Der Mensch als armes oder als reiches Wesen (AAR 104)

The alternative, suggested here by Blumenberg, may leave the impression that it is a question about deciding *for* the one and *against* the other. This, however, is not the case. Rather, Blumenberg's intention is, I believe, to think *beyond* this alternative. Instead, namely, of doing what one would perhaps immediately expect – joining the one alternative at the expense of the other – Blumenberg does in this article what he usually does: He plays through the two models in their rich historical variability by displaying their numerous metaphorical manifestations. To see this as a problematic lack of philosophical determination would be to miss the point. It would be to disregard, namely, that 'rich' and 'poor' does not serve to supply a final answer to the question: 'What is a human being?' 'Rich' and 'poor' are not definitive definitions of something like a 'human nature', but are in themselves metaphorical models for human groundlessness (Cf. Lysemose 2007, 167).

In the abovementioned text, Blumenberg asks what he considers to be the core question of a philosophical anthropology: how is it possible for human beings to exist *despite* our constitutive lack of specific reactive dispositions, i.e. despite our fundamental "indigence of instincts" (*Instinktarmut*) towards reality (AAR 115)? Having asked this question Blumenberg formulates the following answer: Only in so far that we do not engage reality with direct immediacy (*nicht unmittelbar mit dieser Wirklichkeit einlässt*). Blumenberg's general term for the entire constellation of symbolic means which constitutes human existence is *rhetoric*. Blumenberg thus speaks about the anthropological significance of rhetoric (AAR 107) which makes "metaphorical detours" inevitable. Metaphor, therefore, is not simply a chapter in the treatment of rhetorical means: "sie ist signifikantes Element der Rhetorik, an dem ihre Funktion dargestellt und auf ihren anthropologischen Bezug gebracht werden kann" (AAR 116). The anthropological relevance of metaphor – or more generally speaking: Of rhetoric – is found in the statement: "Der Mensch hat zu sich selbst kein unmittelbares, kein rein 'innerliches' Verhältnis. Sein Selbstverständnis hat die Struktur der 'Selbstäußerlichkeit'" (AAR 134). Precisely because we are never present to ourselves in some unmediated form, we need to 'play ourselves out' rhetorically –

by means of symbols, metaphors, comparisons, concepts etc. Rhetoric thereby becomes the 'trans-subjective' medium for Blumenberg's historical investigations into different human self-understandings and concepts of reality (Haverkamp 2001, 451).

Here is the first of two passages from the aforementioned text, both of which shed light on the supposed anthropological significance of metaphor:

> Der menschliche Wirklichkeitsbezug ist indirekt, umständlich, verzögert, selektiv und vor allem 'metaphorisch' […] Der Mensch begreift sich nur über das, was er nicht ist, hinweg. Nicht erst seine Situation, sonder schon seine Konstitution ist potentiell metaphorisch (AAR 115; 134-135)

There are several important points to make about this quote. Firstly, it is striking that the word metaphorical is put in quotation marks. Does this suggest that Blumenberg uses the expression 'metaphorical' metaphorically (Recki 1999, 152)? Does it entail that our relation to reality is always and constitutively mediated metaphorically? Secondly, one should pay close attention to the adverb 'potentially'. The point here is not just to say of the human condition that "its constitution is potentially metaphorical", which is to say, perhaps it is metaphorical, but perhaps not. Rather, it signifies that what constitutes human beings is exactly their *potential* – i.e. ability or force (*potentia*) – to interpret themselves metaphorically. Blumenberg's main interest is above all "*possible* human self-understandings" (EmS) to quote the title of one of his books from the *Nachlass*. How should this be understood? Blumenberg here seems to bring two different traditions together that are often separated: Philosophy of history and anthropology (Sommer 2006, 54): Humans are in need of and find it significant to have images of themselves. Through such images, however, humans are changeable. That is the reason why writing the history of these different human self-images (or metaphors) is a way of doing anthropology. As far as I can see, Blumenberg's phenomenology of history is an attempt to bring to life possible human self-understandings by 'unfreezing', so to speak, the frozen blocks of the past. His-

tory thus confronts us with possibilities; actualises the "plasticity of the image of what can be" (*der Plastizität der Vorstellung von dem, was sein kann*) (PM 82).

In his book *The Fictive and the Imaginary* (*Das Fiktive und das Imaginäre*) Wolfgang Iser deals with the anything but self-evident boundaries between the fictive, the real and the imaginary. Iser uses the metaphor *plasticity of human nature* to single out the main function of literature. According to Iser, literature functions as the projection surface for the fictional 'processing' of contingency and thus for the playing through of *possible* human self-understandings:

> If the plasticity of human nature allows, through its multiple culture-bound patternings, limitless human self-cultivation, literature becomes a panorama of what is possible, because it is not hedged in by either the limitations or the considerations that determine the institutionalized organisations within which human life otherwise takes its course (Iser 1993, xviii)

Literature is not simply fictional. If a literary text would contain no reference at all to known reality it would lie obscurely beyond our understanding. Consequently, the commonplace opposition between reality and fiction must be, Iser argues, discarded and replaced with a triad: The real, the fictive and the imaginary (Iser 1993, 1). Because the literary text is a blend of reality and fiction a *tertium comparationis* is needed – something which Iser calls "the imaginary" (*das Imaginäre*). Even though we always seem to live with a "tacit knowledge" (*stumme Wissen*) of what is real and what is fictional this distinction does not carry the mark of an unshakeable *factum brutum*. Literature brings about an *interaction* between the given and the imagined that holds anthropological relevance because it features "a continual patterning of human plasticity", i.e. facilitates "human self-interpretation through literature" (Iser 1993, xiii).

In Blumenberg's writings the past becomes this "reservoir out of which possible self-understandings are fed" (Goldstein 1999, 208). The fact that humans have no direct or immediate self-relation – the impossibility of being present to ourselves without the need for mediation – is what underlies the anthropologi-

cal inescapability of metaphors, our constitutive "dependency on rhetorical acts" (AAR 134).

### 1.3 Absolute Metaphors

'What is truth?' 'What is time?' 'What is the world?' Absolute metaphors can be described as the unspoken 'answers' to such questions. What makes a metaphor absolute is, formally speaking, its resistance to translation into conceptual clarity, its opposition to univocal terminology (PM 12). Absolute metaphors are pseudo-conceptual 'ideas' of such indeterminacy that if "placed in the subject position of a sentence and followed by a copula they cannot *not* draw metaphors in their wake" (Savage 2009, 127; Cf. TdU 61-62). The unspoken 'definition' of an absolute metaphor seems slightly paradoxical: That which *cannot* be 'transferred' (*meta-fora*) into a concept. This, of course, presupposes a certain definition of concepts. In this regard one can, with advantage, recall Kant's distinction between 'concepts' (*Begriffe*) and 'ideas' (*Ideen*), which are respectively assigned to human understanding (*Verstand*) and reason (*Vernunft*). Concepts possess, in the language of Kant, 'objective reality' only if they can somehow be the *possible* object of intuition. Concepts thus receive their objective reality only through possible experience or 'intuition': "Wenn eine Erkenntnis objektive Realität haben (…) soll (…) so muss der Gegenstand auf irgend eine Art gegeben werden können" (Kant 1787, 199 (B 194)). Ideas, on the other hand, cannot be made subject to the same demand simply because "ihnen schlechterdings keine Anschauung angemessen gegeben werden kann" (Kant 1790, 459 (B 254)). Ideas do not, therefore, possess objective reality since they lack intuitional foundation; but that does *not* imply that they possess no reality at all. Rather, their 'reality' may be said to be of another kind than the one ascribed to concepts. Blumenberg seems to subscribe to the Kantian assertion that the concept is not capable of doing all that reason demands: "Der Begriff vermag nicht alles, was die Vernunft verlangt" (TdU 11). I return to a more systematic discussion of the Kantian heritage in Blumenberg's metaphorology below.

For systematic reasons, one can distinguish between the *pragmatic* (Cf. PM 29; 77) and the *theoretical* (Cf. PM 25; 193) function of absolute metaphors. On the

one hand, absolute metaphors find their theoretical function in representing the totality of reality, that which can never be seen or experienced. They are the 'placeholders' for "das nie erfahrbare, nie übersehbare ganze der Welt" (PM 25) and thus represent that which *in principle* cannot be an object of our experience. 'World', 'time', 'self', 'death', 'truth', 'God' … (TdU 9) are all examples of absolute metaphors. They are absolute because they withdraw themselves from intuitional representation: "Die Welt ist dadurch definiert, kein Gegenstand zu sein" (dS, 219). The same could be said about death. That 'death' is not a possible object of experience does not mean, however, that this idea can simply be kept silent or that it is rendered superfluous. Absolute metaphors are the (non-discursive) 'answers' to questions about totality; they open up access to the "horizons of totality" (Wetz 1993, 21).

Absolute metaphors, on the other hand, receive their 'pragmatic' function by giving orientation, by inducing a certain attitude (*Verhalten*) to such totalities. Their truth value is not discursive but pragmatic, i.e. they motivate and encourage certain expectations, activities, wishes, hopes, indifferences and interests (PM 25). To say, for instance, that the "world is a book" (Cf. Leg) immediately gives rise to a wide range of 'metaphorical expectations' about the nature of our experience (TdU 99). To say that "truth is the daughter of time" (Bacon) or that "reason is light" likewise awakens certain desires and associations which regulate certain world attitudes and expectations. Moreover, absolute metaphors find their pragmatic function in giving guidance and affording ground for orientation. They establish a certain 'system of co-ordinates' and settle a sense of direction. In short: Their pragmatic function is of an (indispensable) orientational character.

The idea that human reason is in need of orientation has a Kantian background. In his small text from 1786, *Was heißt: Sich im Denken orientieren?*, Kant maintains that human reason requires orientation. He here talks about 'reason's own need' (*ihr eigenes Bedürfnis*) for orientation (Kant 1786, 270). Orientation is not knowledge (*Erkenntnis*) but rather a need felt inherently in reason (*gefühltes Bedürfnis der Vernunft*) (274). We may look to the right or to the left, but we never see right or left in themselves; and we only know the one through negation of

the other (Stegmaier 2005, 19). Subsequently, orientation is not a *discursive knowledge*, but a *figurative requirement* 'attached' to reason self. Reason has a basic need for *bildliche Vorstellungen* (Kant 1790, 267), i.e. for a kind of figurative representation. Kant even refers to reason's *right* (*Recht*) presupposing and assuming something that it has no objective reasons (*Gründe*) to maintain, but is based on indispensable 'subjective' *Unterscheidungsgründe* (270). Such figurative representational models are indispensable for our practical actions; without them orientation would not be possible. Human contingency must, as Vida Pavesich states, be understood "as a radical *need for orientation*" (Pavesich 2009, 429).

The word 'orientation' is derived from the word 'Orient', meaning something like 'facing the East', turning towards the sun rise (from *oriri* to rise, come forth). In order to orientate one has to know at least where one point is, one is in need of (at least) one distinctive marker – 'the Orient' for instance. When Blumenberg speaks about absolute metaphors being 'models of orientation' (*Orientierungsmodelle*, PM 144) that give orientational support (*orientierende Anhalt*, PM 166), the Kantian background seems to be implicitly present. Kant knew that the sharp separation between intuition and concept were in fact a theoretical *fata morgana*; in order, namely, to make concepts suitable for experience they always need a certain figurative representation, an 'intuitional' basis (Kant 1786, 267; Cf. Stegmaier 2005, 25f).

It has often been pointed out that Kant is one of the main philosophical influences on Blumenberg's metaphorology (e.g. Stoellger 2000, 12; Haverkamp 2001, 439). Even though Blumenberg explicitly acknowledges that his metaphorology has received important impulses from Kant (Cf. PM 11) he nonetheless often holds a systematically unarticulated, slumbering presence in Blumenberg's writings. It therefore seems necessary to qualify in which way and with what consequences Kant's thinking can be said to be present in Blumenberg's writings. My intention in doing so is not motivated by an exegetical interest. Rather, I intend to shed light on the *thematic* implications of Blumenberg's Kantian heritage in order to thereby evaluate the *systematic* scope of his metaphorology.

*Aber Kant war kein Kantianer…*

Martin Heidegger[8]

## 2. The Kantian Heritage

This Kantian heritage can, for systematic reasons, be presented in the following steps that all draw attention to central aspects of Kant's 'critical trilogy'. First, however, a few introductory remarks about the idea of metaphysics are needed.

### 2.1 Metaphysics – a Question about certain Questions?

The question 'what is metaphysics?' is not only highly complex but also presupposes that metaphysics is in fact to be found in the definite, singular form. A glance at almost any entry on metaphysics in a dictionary of philosophy would quickly undermine this presupposition. But despite the pervasive confusion surrounding the question of metaphysics, I will try to specify a disciplined interpretation of this concept, taking Kant as my point of departure.

The status of metaphysics in Kant's critical oeuvre is notoriously intricate. The matter is complex and displays an essential ambiguity in regard to Kant's critical thinking as such. Without doubt: Kant criticised metaphysics. But Kant's critical enterprise is directed against a *specific* form of metaphysics, and not just *any* kind of metaphysics, not metaphysics "schlechthin und überhaupt" (Marquard 1962, 239). His intention is not to demolish metaphysics *in toto*, but a certain kind of metaphysics – namely the rationalistic school metaphysics of his time (most prominently represented by Leibniz and Wolff). This kind of metaphysics is – according to Marquard – characterised by an attempt to grasp totality, i.e. to think the world in its entirety by means of methodical ideals derived from the (exact) natural sciences. Moreover, the kind of metaphysics that Kant passes strictures on is the one present to his time: The rational school metaphysics of the Enlightenment which proceeds *more geometrico* and claims its ideals

[8] Martin Heidegger: *Logik, Die frage nach dem Wahrheit* in: Gesamtausgabe Band 21, Frankfurt am Main: 1976, p. 117.

from the natural sciences. Metaphysics, in this particular form, wants to apply the mathematical-scientific 'tools for thought' (*Denkmitteln*) on totality: On the whole of human reality. However, in striving towards this ambition of totality it writes unsecured cheques by transcending its bounds and overstepping its powers. From this Kant concludes that the methodological requirements adopted by this particular form of metaphysics are in fact inadequate and unsuitable to metaphysics proper (Marquard 1958, 61). The need for a critique of pure reason, i.e. for reason's self-restriction, is therefore identical with a limitation of its extension in regard to its objects (which, by the way, is mapped out by means of Kant's spatial and territorial metaphorics (Cf. TdU 92-93)). The characteristic features of the rationalistic school of metaphysics is therefore *not* that it wants to think totality, but rather that it wants to do so with the instruments and resources of the natural sciences:

> Auch diese Metaphysik will, was jede Metaphysik will: das Ganze denken. Aber sie will es mit Mitteln exakter Wissenschaft. Das Schicksal der Metaphysik hängt ab von der Reichweite mathematischer Naturwissenschaft also dann, wenn es sich um eine Metaphysik handelt, die mit Denkmitteln mathematischer Naturwissenschaft operiert; also dann, wenn es sich bei dieser Metaphysik um einen Metaphysikversuch mathematischer Naturwissenschaft handelt, also dann, wenn diese Metaphysik den Versuch der exakten Wissenschaft aktualisiert, das Ganze zu denken, d.h. wenn sie den Totalitätsanspruch dieser Wissenschaft aktualisiert. Diese Metaphysik und keine andere stellt Kant in Frage (Marquard 1962, 239)

The claim that Kant wanted to get rid of metaphysics as such is therefore utterly false. Kant does not criticise metaphysics in favour of the natural sciences; he criticises the natural sciences in favour of the *possibility* of a metaphysics that is *not* tortured by the 'cognitive' ideals of the exact sciences (Marquard 1958, 61). According to Kant, humans, on the one hand, have a natural disposition to metaphysics (*metaphysica naturalis*). This 'need' is deep-seated in human reason (*Vernunft*) and therefore impossible to remove. We simply cannot – according to Kant – avoid thinking metaphysically. On the other hand, however, is it obvious

to Kant that metaphysics as *Wissenschaft* – the German term does not refer to the 'natural sciences' but has its background in Aristotle's ἐπιστήμη meaning something like 'theoretical knowledge systematically based on principles of reason' – has never, up until Kant's critical philosophy, found realisation. As a famous passage in his introduction to the second version of *Critique of pure Reason* asserts,

> (…) Metaphysik ist, wenn gleich nicht als Wissenschaft, doch als Naturanlage (metaphysica naturalis) wirklich. Denn die menschliche Vernunft geht unaufhaltsam (…) durch eigenes Bedürfnis getrieben zu solchen Fragen fort, die durch keinen Erfahrungsgebrauch der Vernunft und daher entlehnte Prinzipien beantwortet werden können, uns so ist in allen Menschen, so bald Vernunft sich in ihnen bis zur Spekulation erweitert, irgend eine Metaphysik zu aller Zeit gewesen und wird auch immer darin bleiben (Kant 1787, 60 (B 21))

Kant calls for a 'rebirth' (*Wiedergeburt*) of metaphysics brought about by a "thorough and complete critique of pure reason" (Kant 1783, 244). Such a critique is exactly what Kant's transcendental philosophy should deliver. By undertaking a critical examination of pure reason, transcendental philosophy should at the same time *prepare for* metaphysics proper. Transcendental philosophy only functions as a propaedeutic, as "die Halle, oder der Vorhof der eigentlichen Metaphysik" (Kant 1787, B VIII). The title 'metaphysics' can also, as Kant points out in his *Transzendentale Methodenlehre*, be used as a designator for "der ganzen reinen Philosophie mit Inbegriff der Kritik"(Kant 1787, B 868). The question of metaphysics already at this point is marked by ambiguity.

In spite of the indisputable complexity of metaphysics in Kant, I suggest we define 'metaphysics', for the purposes of this enquiry and perhaps somewhat idiosyncratically, as *a question about (certain) questions*. Metaphysics in other words has to do with questions; but, of course, not all questions are metaphysical. Metaphysical questions are of a *certain* kind. But the nature of these questions is uncertain and can only be indicated 'formally'. One way of articulating the formal structure of metaphysical questions could be: Questions which cannot find theoretical answers without for that reason being eliminable. Meta-

physical questions are those which cannot be eliminated *in spite of* a failure to find theoretical answers. This definition evokes the often quoted opening lines of Kant's first critique. Here Kant maintains that it belongs to the 'destiny' (*Schicksal*) of human reason "daß sie durch Fragen belästigt wird, die sie nicht abweisen kann (…) die sie aber auch nicht beantworten kann" (Kant 1781, 11 (AVII)). Such questions are meta-physical exactly because they transcend (metá-, trans-) the sphere of 'physical' facts. But being (theoretically) unanswerable does not mean being dismissible. That is the reason why metaphysics, according to Kant, is in fact ineradicable. In *Prolegomena* Kant thus makes the following observation:

> Daß der Geist des Menschen metaphysische Untersuchungen einmal gänzlich aufgeben werde, ist eben so wenig zu erwarten, als daß wir, um nicht immer unreine Luft zu schöpfen, das Atemholen einmal lieber ganz und gar einstellen würden. Es wird also in der Welt jederzeit, und was noch mehr, bei jedem, vornehmlich dem nachdenkenden Menschen Metaphysik sein (Kant 1783, 245)

Metaphysics is, literally speaking, a vital human activity. It is compared with the indispensable activity of drawing one's breath. Kant speaks about reason's 'inclination' (*Hang*) to ask questions that cannot be answered through experience, i.e. questions that do find "ein kongruierender Gegenstand in irgend einer möglichen Erfahrung" (Kant 1787 440, B 490)) but even so cannot simply be given up or reduced to breathless silence. Such questions do not have 'reality', since they fall outside the sphere of possible intuition; but they have *Wirklichkeit* since they are actively 'at work' (*wirken*) *despite* their poor prospects of finding adequate answers. I shall return to a discussion of the difference between 'reality' and 'Wirklichkeit' in Part III, chapter 3.4.

Hence, the important thing in this connection is that metaphysics can be understood as a *quest for answering questions which lie outside the remit of possible intuition*; metaphysics is the label for theoretically unanswerable, and yet fundamentally inescapable questions. With this preliminary definition of metaphysics

in place, I will now turn my attention to the specific questions which Blumenberg – through Kant – is concerned with.

### 2.2 Translating Metaphysics into Anthropology: Philosophy According to the World-Concept

It is well-known that Kant (in the last part of his *Transzendentale Methodenlehre*) asks the following three questions: "What can we know? What ought we to do? For what may we hope?" (Kant 1787, 677 (B 833)). These three questions are then later (in the *Lectures on Logic* (1800)) synthesised into a fourth question, namely: "What is a Human being?" The first question, Kant writes, "is answered by Metaphysics, the second by Morals, the third by Religion and the fourth by Anthropology. In reality, however, all these might be reckoned under anthropology, since the first three questions refer to the last" (Kant 1800, 448). Does this recapitulation of the first three questions into the fourth suggest that metaphysics, morals and religion according to Kant all have a basic *anthropological foundation*? The question is far less easy to answer than one might immediately expect. It is, of course, obvious that the elucidation of the first question – what can we know? – necessarily has implications for our self-conception and hence contributes to a clarification of human self-understanding. The problem, however, is that Kant cannot restrict himself to simply speak about *human* reason since "jede transzendentale Einsicht in die Struktur der Erkenntnis die Geltung in jeder Welt und nur für jedes Subjekt besitzen soll" (BM 501). Reason cannot – that is the unspoken transcendental requirement – simply be human reason but has to be reason *as such*. Any anthropological limitation would compromise the transcendental character of Kant's critical enterprise.

But this transcendental demand is abstract, and it threatens to take leave of the concrete human world in which we live. In order to compensate for the abstract character of philosophy required by transcendental philosophy, Kant introduces a distinction between philosophy according to what he calls "the school-concept" (*Schulbegriff*) and philosophy according to its "world-concept" (*Weltbegriff*) (Ibid. 446; Cf. Kant 1787 (B 866); Cf. BM 500). Now, the important thing here is that the abovementioned questions are in fact *not* part of transcen-

dental philosophy's "Vernunfterkenntnisse aus Begriffen" but instead belong to philosophy according to its world-concept which, Kant states, means "die Wissenschaft von den letzten Zwecken der menschlichen Vernunft" (Kant 1800, 445). Philosophy in this latter sense is not in any way inferior to the former; on the contrary: Not only are *both* needed; philosophy is "given dignity", Kant writes, by means of the world-concept and thus receives "an absolute value" (Kant 1800, 445) by addressing what Blumenberg calls a "menschenfreundlich gemachter Begriff von Philosophie" (BM 500). In other words: Besides the critical enterprise brought about by transcendental philosophy there is another philosophy that deals with the orientational problems of human life that transcendental philosophy does not – and cannot – address.

One could, following Marquard, interpret Kant's 'double dealing' of philosophy as a *turn to life-world* or as a *turn to anthropology* (Marquard 1973, 126-127). Kant's catalogue of questions serves as a way of attending to the human need for meaning and significance that philosophy according to the school-concept does not supply. Philosophy according to the world-concept is ultimately dealing with the chief anthropological question: "What is a human being?" and therefore describable as a philosophical turn to anthropology. This turn may even be said to be motivated by the fading obviousness of its answer: Kant's philosophical turn to anthropology is itself the answer to the vanishing of self-evident answers to this chief anthropological question. My hypothesis here is that Kant's philosophy according to the world-concept is a first attempt to bring the unanswerable questions of metaphysics closer to an anthropological foundation. In this vein, his turn to anthropology is carried into effect by the formulation of the abovementioned three specific questions that are ultimately summarized in the main anthropological question: What is a human being?

### 2.3 Transposing the Kantian Questions

The abovementioned Kantian questions receive a remarkable transformation in Blumenberg's metaphorology. In the lead of *Die Lesbarkeit der Welt* (LeW, 1981), – written exactly two hundred years after the first version of Kant's *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* was published in Riga –, Blumenberg undertakes a modulation

of Kant's abovementioned philosophical questions into the *pluperfect*. This temporal alteration of the questions signals a significant change in the metaphorological approach to metaphysics. By asking not 'What can we know?' but rather 'What did we want to know?' a certain *distance* to these questions is attained. Metaphorology is not, Blumenberg maintains, a *method* of producing answers to the 'unanswerable' questions with which absolute metaphors are dealing. As practitioners of metaphorology we have already, he writes, "robbed ourselves of the possibility of finding 'answers' to those unanswerable questions" (PM 24; Adams 1991, 156). This at once suggests that metaphorology is a decidedly *historical* enterprise. That a metaphor is absolute does not, however, imply, as Blumenberg emphasises, that they are *unhistorical*. In fact, absolute metaphors have a history in a more radical sense than concepts since …

> (…) der historische Wandel einer Metapher bringt die Metakinetik geschichtlicher Sinnhorizonte und Sichtweisen selbst zum Vorschein, innerhalb deren Begriffe ihre Modifikationen erfahren (…) die Metaphorologie sucht an die Substruktur des Denkens heranzukommen, an den Untergrund, die Nährlösung der systematischen Kristallisationen, aber sie will auch fassbar machen, mit welchem 'Mut' sich der Geist in seinen Bildern selbst voraus ist und wie sich im Mut zur Vermutung seine Geschichte entwirft (PM 13)

Absolute metaphors can change and are even replaceable by other absolute metaphors. In fact, their changeability is what makes them relevant and central "guiding fossils" (*Leitfossilen*, SB 144; SZ 87; Hundeck 2000, 124f)[9] in regard to the unearthing of historical horizons of significance (*Sinn*) and 'viewpoints' (*Sichtweisen*). They serve as semantic tools for digging out the metaphorical 'underground' or 'substructure' of the conceptual 'surface'. Such formulations are

[9] Blumenberg reserves this expression for *concepts* in the cited text (written in 1970): "Es gibt Begriffe, die für eine geschichtliche Formation dieselbe Bedeutung haben wie Leitfossilien für eine geologische" (SB 144). In *Schiffbruch mit Zuschauer*, however, he writes: "Metaphern sind in diesem Sinne Leitfossilien einer archaischen Schicht des Prozesses der theoretischen Neugierde, die nicht deshalb anachronistisch sein muss, weil es zu der Fülle ihrer Stimulationen und Wahrheitserwartungen keinen Rückweg gibt" (SZ 87).

likely to direct the reader's attention to Foucault's 'archaeology of knowledge' (*archéologie du savoir*) or Reinhart Koselleck's idea of 'time layers' (*Zeitschichten*), that both explicitly find their methodological models of orientation in (structural) *geology* (e.g. Foucault 1969, 11; Koselleck 2000, 19). Does this mean that questions (and answers) of the past are merely of historical interest? Does it imply that the metaphysical questions of the past are treated exclusively in a 'broken', detached perspective? The matter is complicated. I shall therefore return to a thorough discussion of the relationship between (absolute) metaphors and metaphysics in the next chapter.

By bringing the Kantian catalogue of questions in the *plusquamperfectum* the attention is drawn towards the underlying expectations, presumptions and hopes that initiated the quest for knowledge in the first place. The intention of doing so is, Blumenberg seems to think, based on the assumption that also our expectations and disappointments deserve to be studied closely because they, too, inform us about what it is to be a human being. Not only our *insights* but also our motives and desires – the (world) *views* (*Ansichten*) we hold – are indicative of what it means to be a human being (Cf. LeW 5). Blumenberg wants to bring our *expectations* rather than our actual knowledge into focus thereby drawing attention to the motivational background that instigated the pursuit for knowledge in the first place. Hence, also the expectations and disappointments, hopes and regrets attached to this quest deserve attention:

> Es ist zu vermuten, dass auch die Enttäuschungen des Studiums wert sind, weil ihre bohrende Unbestimmtheit ein Moment geschichtlicher Grundstimmungen auf der Skala von der Resignation bis zum Weltzorn ist (…) 'Metaphorologie' ist ein Verfahren, die Spuren solcher Wünsche und Ansprüche aufzufinden, die man durchaus nicht als 'verdrängt' etikettieren muss, um sie interessant zu finden. Auch Erwartungen, die nicht erfüllt worden sind und kaum jemals erfüllt werden können, sind geschichtliche Fakten und Faktoren, Ansätze für immer wieder aufbauende Verlockungen und Verführungen (…) (Leg 3)

Even though we might no longer expect *the* truth from the sciences, we at least want to know why we wanted to know something that could only be grasped through our disappointments (Cf. SZ 87). This approach implies we take the *explicit foreground* of historical documents into consideration – i.e. the stated intentions and specifically negotiated problems – *and* that their unspoken areas of silent obviousness, their *implicit background expectations*, are investigated. Metaphorology thus focuses on the "contends and achievements, proposals and restraints, expectations and disappointments" (Leg 15) which have been invested in absolute metaphors and that are often left unnoticed by more 'traditional' approaches to the history of ideas.

To give an example: Is the answer to St. Augustine's venerable old question "Quid est ergo tempus?"[10] really satisfactory given with the answer: That which one measures with a clock? (SZ 92) At one level this answer is correct, and of considerable pragmatic value, but it still unavoidably seems to carry with it an index of disappointment. This example might shed some light on the unspoken expectations that seem to be involved in our questions: Time is apparently not exhaustively defined or described by the aforementioned answer – even though this answer is in one sense correct. This seems to indicate that (at least some of) our questions carry with them expectations that cannot be exhaustively fulfilled by theoretical answers. One way of approaching these considerations is to focus on the relation between questions and answers. In modern hermeneutical philosophy the relation between questions and answers occupies a prominent position. The most important thing in this context, however, is that there seems to be a kind of 'epistemic difference' between the very nature of questions and answers.

As Hans Robert Jauss has rightly pointed out: Questions do not carry the character of a statement and therefore cannot in a strict sense be either true or false. Jauss quotes E. Weil writing, "The answers are scientific, at least insofar as

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[10] Augustin *Conf.* (Book XI, 14,17). In aphorism 89 of his *Philosophical Investigations* Wittgenstein makes the following comment: "Das, was man weiß, wenn uns niemand fragt, aber nicht mehr weiß, wenn wir es erklären sollen, ist etwas, worauf man sich *besinnen* muss" (Wittgenstein 1953, 337).

they remain subject to rational criticism, the questions are not" (Jauss 1982, 400-401). One could reformulate this claim philosophically by putting the matter this way: While answers are of a *discursive* nature, stating something about the world, questions are of a *figurative* nature and therefore do not possess the bivalent status of being either true or false (which does not, of course, prevent them from being more of less 'reasonable'). Images – and metaphors are in a certain sense language images – do not claim something about the world; rather, they evoke certain expectations and set out guidelines for our attitudes towards it. Since questions are indeed primarily a question about expectations, it is questionable whether one could call a question false. Of course questions can be formulated more or less fruitfully, more or less precisely. But they do not seem to possess the status of being either strictly false or true. Questions have a pre-systematic character (Cf. PM 15) that is 'deposited' in metaphors. They are in a sense *beyond* true or false. Or, in Blumenberg's words, their truth is (in a very broad sense of the word) of a *pragmatic* character (PM 25) related to our practical orientation in the world.

Kant's main anthropological question – 'what is a human being?' – is likewise placed in a backward-turned, memorial horizon. In *Beschreibung des Menschen*, Blumenberg explicitly states that a modern philosophical anthropology is tantamount to investigation into the subjunctive question: 'What did we imagine, were a human being?' Philosophical anthropology, in other words, "(…) ist am ehesten zu bestimmen durch die Erinnerung an die klassische Philosophische Frage „Was ist der Mensch?" (BM 483). The difficulties connected with answering the question related to our historical self-understanding – namely the question: 'Who are we?' – is paralleled by the challenge of answering this very question from the first-person perspective: 'Who am I?'. Max Scheler has characterised this embarrassing situation with the following quote borrowed by Blumenberg: "der Mensch erkennt immer nur das an sich, was er nicht mehr ist – niemals das, was er ist" (Cf. BM 253). Blumenberg's philosophical anthropology is, in a sense, tantamount to a 'transposition' of the question of self-knowledge into the subjunctive form: "Die Frage: *Was bin ich?* Hat sich im Konjunktiv: *Was wäre ich?* noch nicht in Beziehung gesetzt zu der Anthropologischen Grundfrage:

Was ist der Mensch?“ (BM 253). Hence, Blumenberg’s thinking is the attempt to carry out philosophical anthropology within a memorial horizon; but it is an attempt which is constantly aware of the difficulties in doing so. The mistrust of memory as an unfailing organ for self-knowledge is not without reason: “Denn nicht minder besteht die Vermutung, dass einer gerade nicht mehr der ist, der er war, *weil* er dieser gewesen ist. Keine menschliche Gegenwart ist einfach das summative Resultat ihrer Vergangenheiten“ (BM 260). The ’indissoluble’ relation between memory and imagination menaces the common belief that our memory once and for all reveals to us who we ‘really’ are. Every memory has dimensions of uncertainty and therefore transcends pure factuality by awakening *possible* self-understandings. Or to be more precise: We never just remember ‘who we were’ without at the same time remembering ‘who we could have been’. Every memory holds dimensions of the possible.

Blumenberg’s strategy does not serve to supply a final and definitive answer to the long-standing anthropological question. Rather, it can be seen as a strategy to preserve historical articulations of *possible* answers in order to make these the historical prism for an *actual*, however indirect, approach to “the lapidary question” (BM 499): “What is a Human being?” Important in this context is the *anthropological function* of question and answers (Jauss 1982, 381). Questions and answers have anthropological significance because they display the contingency of human world- and self-understanding. The underlying assertion here seems to be that philosophy should function as a kind of ”memorial post” (*Erinnerungspost*) that has to work out the question for which, we now concede, there *may* be no answers. Or even: Only when answers to such questions have become obsolete can they come to light:

> Aufs Ganze seiner Resultate gesehen, hat philosophisches Denken unendlich viel mehr daran gesetzt, Fragen auszuarbeiten als Antworten auf diese Fragen zu geben. Oft allerdings mussten die Fragen den Antworten nachgeschoben werden, weil es immer wieder Aussagen, Thesen, Lehrsätzen gibt, bei denen erst nachträglich herausgefunden werden kann, auf welche Fragestellungen sie die Antwort darstellen. Da liegt ein elementarer Sachverhalt der Geschichte: Erst nachträglich werden Sätze und Systeme, indem man nach der Verlegenheit

> angestrengt sucht, der sie abhelfen könnten, zu Antworten auf Fragen, die unbekannt gewesen waren, bevor man die Lösung wusste (BM 497)

If Kant's catalogue of philosophical questions according to the world-concept was the first attempt to bring the 'unanswerable', yet unavoidable, metaphysical questions within the reach of human experience, by giving them an anthropological foundation, Blumenberg's modulation of these into a memorial horizon seems to be a kind of 'second order' anthropology. Blumenberg's metaphorology inscribes the Kantian catalogue of questions, according to the world-concept, into a historical-retentional horizon; it is describable as 'after-metaphysical' exactly because it translates these metaphysical questions into the *pluperfect* frame of second order 'Nach-denklichkeit'.

*Diese Erinnerung geht vornehmlich*
*den Begriff der Freiheit an…*
Kant[11]

**2.4 The Categorical Imperative: Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals**

Another striking Kantian impulse in Blumenberg's philosophy is what has been characterised as its 'memorial ethos' (e.g. Hundeck 2000, 16) or Blumenberg's 'pathos of remembrance' (Wetz 1999, 31). There are different formulations of this ethos in Blumenberg's works (eg. H 39; BM 188-189; 481-482; LW 303; Leg 409). One of the more pointed formulations, however, is found in a speech delivered at the University of Heidelberg in 1978, where Blumenberg received the so-called *Kuno-Fischer-Preis*. In this speech of thanks to Ernst Cassirer, Blumenberg addresses the problem of historicity in the humanities. In his eyes research into history is constrained by an obligation to something one could call 'memory of

[11] I. Kant: *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft*, in: *Werke in sechs Bände*, Bd. IV (Edt. Wilhelm Weischedel), (Lizenzausgabe für die Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft: Darmstadt 1998), p. 112 (A 12).

the Human' (Hrachovec 1994, 1). This memorial ethos of Blumenberg's philosophy finds its striking expression in the following lines:

> Es mag sein, daß man aus der Geschichte lernen kann – oder auch nicht. Das ist sekundär gegenüber der elementaren Obligation, menschliches nicht verloren zu geben (…) Es ist nicht Sache unserer Wahl, sondern des an uns bestehenden Anspruches, die Ubiquität des Menschlichen präsent zu halten (EC 170-171)

This formulation could well be seen as a 'historicist' variation of the categorical imperative that we find by Kant in his *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785). Kant here writes that it is necessary "sich selbst und alle anderen niemals bloß als Mittel, sondern jederzeit zugleich als Zweck an sich selbst [zu] behandeln" (Kant 1785, 66). This particular Kantian formulation of the categorical imperative is, in other words, translated historicistically by Blumenberg (Willock 1985, 70-71). Blumenberg thus distances himself from what he refers to as the "absolutism of whatever happens to be present" (*Absolutismus der jeweiligen Gegenwart*) (GkW 124/GdK 150) thereby seeking to avoid an instrumentalisation of the past by the 'arbitrarily' present. The past should never be regarded solely as means for the current needs of actualisation (*Aktualitätsbedürfnisse einer Gegenwart*) (EC 168); it should always be considered as an end in itself. What is hereby avoided is what from Blumenberg's perspective forms a problematic tendency to make the actual the unspoken standard of the past by considering it from a one-sided retrospective point of view (Sommer 2006, 58). This is, one could argue, a notable redeployment of Kant's categorical imperative that finds its medium of articulation in memory. 'To rescue the phenomena from oblivion' would probably be an appropriate formula for Blumenberg's metaphorological enterprise that finds it's attachment to tradition in the following passage:

> Rettung der Phänomene ist nicht nur eine Formel der klassischen Astronomie, sondern auch der 'erschließenden' theoretischen Verfahren, die Phänomene davor retten, übersehen und vergessen, verachtet und für irrelevant erklärt zu werden. Etwa: wenn es so etwas wie eine Metaphorologie geben darf und soll, so gegen die traditio-

> nelle Missachtung alles Rhetorischen durch die Philosophie seit Plato und alle die, die bessere Wahrheiten anbieten zu können glaubten (ZdS 190)

This obligation to remember reflects a Kantian impulse. It is an ethos that destroys, as Blumenberg says, "die Mediatisierung der Vergangenheit für die Gegenwart, für *eine* Gegenwart, für deren Relevanzforderung, ihre Aktualitätsbedürfnisse, die nur das auf diese Gegenwart durchschlagende gelten lassen" (EC 170). This memorial ethos – not to give anything human significant lost – is also, as we shall see, brought into play with the idea of God in Blumenberg's writings.

Were one to systematise the different formulations of this memorial ethos in Blumenberg's writings, it could be done so by distinguishing between the following four different argumentative layers:

1) *History of Reception. The Past as the living Underground of the Present.* We need memory in order to understand ourselves since the actual is not completely detached from (interpretations of) the past. Reflection on the past thus also renders an understanding of the actual possible. As Blumenberg puts it, we do not *have* the same problems as Kant; but our problems would not *have been* the same had Kant not lived (Ems 90). Or, with a somewhat more metaphorical description, one could say that we as humans are "creatures with a lot of 'back' (*mit viel 'Rücken'*), who have to live under the condition that a large part of reality lies behind us" (WM 175/AM 193). Thus, even though our 'sight' is pointing forwards towards the future, we nonetheless are formed and shaped by the things we have 'behind us'. Historical memory therefore is an essential source for the articulating of possible self-understandings.

2) *History of Imagination. The Past as an inexhaustible Reservoir of Imagination.* The past contains considerable if not incomparably rich reserves of imagination. We would never be able to think out the same (imaginatively

3) *Methodological Agnosticism.* Blumenberg's works are characterised by an interest in even the uttermost marginalised, historically remote 'particles of significance' (Cf. Behrenberg 1994, 1). If we firm up our formulation, this *openness* towards the past could be regarded as a reflex reaction to what has been discussed as Blumenberg's methodological agnosticism: We do not know in advance exactly what we want to know and what is worth knowing. This kind of *docta ignoratia* (Cusanus) functions as the 'methodological' background for Blumenberg's considerations. Its fruitfulness lies in a constant work on the apparently self-evident. By asking questions of the questions we think we know the meaning of, Blumenberg's metaphorology 'destabilizes' our self-understanding by releasing contingency.

4) *History of Culture as Freedom.* The concept of culture plays a significant role in Blumenberg's philosophy. Culture is also, he writes, a respect of all that which we cannot understand and the questions that we cannot answer. In his short text, *Nachdenklichkeit*, Blumenberg brings his memorial ethos to bear on questions: "Kultur ist auch Respektierung der Fragen, die wir nicht beantworten können, die uns nur nachdenklich machen und nachdenklich bleiben lassen" (Na 61). Birgit Recki has pointed out that Blumenberg's use of the metaphor of detours (*Umwege*) returns to Ernst Cassirer (Recki 2004, 188 [note 42]). It appears that this idea of culture fruitfully connects with Kant's thoughts in § 83 in his *Critique of Judgment*. Here Kant explicitly treats the idea of 'human culture' (*Cultur des Menschen*).

Blumenberg even insists that whatever was *not* put into reality nonetheless makes us familiar with the immense possibilities and cultural wealth of human beings. This could also be seen as a basic anthropological claim about the *unfinished* human 'nature': Memory is not only a distinguishing anthropological mark – humans have memory not just recollection – but also serves as the main key for a philosophical re-opening of possible human self-understandings. This work on possible human self-understandings is guided by a memorial ethos not to give up for lost anything that is human.

*…so ist alle unsere Erkenntniß*
*von Gott bloß symbolisch*
Kant[12]

### 2.4 Absolute Metaphors – Kant's third Critique

The most decisive notion that designates a heritage from Kant is found in Blumenberg's idea of absolute metaphors. In *Paradigmen* Blumenberg thus explicitly refers to the *Critique of Judgement* where Kant in §59 remarks on the figurative

[12] I. Kant: *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, in: *Werke in sechs Bände*, Bd. V (Edt. Wilhelm Weischedel), (Lizenzausgabe für die Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft: Darmstadt 1998), p. 461 (B 257).

need of human reason (*Vernunft*). There exists, according to Kant, certain kinds of metaphors that he – using the language of his time – calls symbols. They are characterised by giving expression to something where "no sensual intuition can be adequately given" (*keine sinnliche Anschauung angemessen sein kann*) – or even to something to which there will perhaps "never be a corresponding intuition" (*vielleicht nie eine Anschauung korrespondieren kann*) (Kant 1790, 459 (B 255)). It is exactly this observation that according to Kant deserves "a deeper investigation" (*eine tiefere Untersuchung*) and which is been pursued in Blumenberg's metaphorology. The expression "symbolic", that Kant uses, thus corresponds with Blumenberg's idea of "absolute metaphors" (Cf. TdU 58-59). Since God is not an object of possible experience, "all our knowledge about God is symbolic" (Kant 1790, 461 (B 257)). This comment is of particular importance here: We are dealing with, as Blumenberg notes, a concept (or with Kant: an idea) to which no possible intuition can be provided. As such the objective reality of 'God' cannot possibly be demonstrated. But that does not at once imply that this idea is deprived of reality as such. Rather, we here have to do with an idea that obtains its reality through the *process of reason itself* – if at all: "Begriffe, deren Realität nur im *Prozess* der Vernunft selbst begründet sein kann, wenn sie überhaupt eine solche beanspruchen könne" (TdU 55). That reason (*Vernunft*) has *interests* and asks questions which fall outside the territorial jurisdiction of understanding is repeatedly suggested by Kant. It is these interests and these questions which absolute metaphors 'safeguard' by providing them with 'answers'.

The French translation of *Paradigmen* (translated by Didier Gammelin: *Paradigmes pour une metaphorology,* Paris 2006) offers an understanding of absolute metaphors that the German text does not seem to supply an explicit voice for. In the French version the phrase "repräsentieren das nie erfahrbare, nie übersehbare Ganze der Realität" has been translated to "représentent le tout de la réalité, que l'on ne peut jamais ignorer non plus" (Blumenberg/Gammelin 2006, 20). Now, the German expression "übersehbar" definitely has both the meaning of that which can be surveyed or embraced *and* that which can be overlooked, failed to be noticed and hence ignored. The expression "das nie erfahrbare, nie übersehbare Ganze", however, is used as an *apposition* in the German text reiter-

ating the fact that the all-encompassing reality itself can never be experienced, can never be embraced. What makes the French translation alluring is that from a factual point of view it manages, however inadvertently, to hit the nail on the head, since it articulates the pivotal idea of absolute metaphors very succinctly: Something that cannot be sufficiently answered by means of theory *without for that reason* to be rendered superfluous or to be eliminable.

One of Kant's many great achievements is to have insisted on the impossibility of attaining theoretical knowledge about the totality of the world. This famous insight, crystallised in his so called *Antinomienlehre*, renders it untenable to make 'theoretical' statements about the totality of the world, since the world *as such* can be no possible object of experience. But it is of lasting importance to realise that this according to Kant does *not* imply that we can simply dismiss the need to do so. In the words of Blumenberg:

> Obwohl es seit Kants Antinomien müßig ist, über das Ganze der Welt theoretische Aussagen zu machen, ist es doch keineswegs gleichgültig, nach den Bildern zu fahnden, die dieses als Gegenständlichkeit unerreichbare Ganze 'vertretend' vorstellig machen (PM 25)

It is obvious that Blumenberg's idea of absolute metaphors should be seen against this Kantian background. The already quoted passage from the first critique seems to sound even more clearly in the following passage, where Blumenberg 'defines' absolute metaphors as 'answers' to 'unanswerable questions':

> Absolute Metaphern 'beantworten' jene vermeintlich naiven, prinzipiell unbeantwortbaren Fragen, deren Relevanz ganz einfach darin liegt, dass sie nicht eliminierbar sind, weil wir sie nicht *stellen*, sondern als im Daseinsgrund *gestellte* vorfinden (PM 23)

This passage raises several questions. First of all, the expression 'we' might give occasion for suspicion. Who is the 'we' that asks these alleged inescapable, 'unanswerable' questions? The same goes, of course, for the 'anonymous' subject in the earlier quoted transformation of Kant's questions: "Was war es doch, was

wir eigentlich wissen wollten?" (BM 497) or: "Welches war die Welt, die man haben zu können glaubten" (LeW 10). The grammatical subject of these questions is left undecided. Even though it would be an obvious move to understand Blumenberg's considerations in relation to Kant's thinking (in particular the basic idea that it belongs to human reason *itself* to ask questions, which it cannot answer), I would suggest understanding *language* (in a broad sense) as the 'carrier' of such unanswerable questions. Blumenberg does not speak a-historically about 'human reason' (as Kant tends to do). Reason seems to have lost it's "a-historical innocence" (Cf. PM 26) in Blumenberg; but that doesn't entail that we decide with complete freedom which problems we face or which questions we ask: We are not unbounded in our freedom to determine which questions we are confronted with. Some questions are handed to us anonymously; they extend a pre-systematic pressure and, one could perhaps say, regulate what we think we need to know.

Absolute metaphors 'answer' the 'unanswerable' questions, Blumenberg writes, which are found (passively) *already asked* in "the ground of being" (*im Daseinsgrund*). Even though this circumscription of absolute metaphors as 'answers' remains vague (Peres 1998, 3), it does not imply that the conceptually incomprehensible and theoretically inaccessible is not somehow "intelligible intentional objects of man in a broader sense and even such as to carry in them the continuous demand to be known" (Peres 1998, 4). Again it would be fruitful, I think, to refer to Kant. That we need basic images of totality – implicative metaphorical *Leitvorstellungen* (Cf. PM 20) – is not only a 'theoretical' statement about our epistemological situation stating that where the referential object is not a possible object of intuition we need absolute metaphors. It is also, and perhaps even more so, a Kantian claim about *the primacy of practical reason*. Hence, to both Kant and Blumenberg Levinas' proposition seems to hold: "Au commencement était l'intérêt" (Levinas 2004, 201). Absolute metaphors are the historical carriers of pre-reflexive expectations and unspoken interests; they do not determine their objects (in a Kantian sense), but rather determine "our *attitudes* to objects" (*unseres Verhaltens zu Gegenstände*) (TdU, 58; Cf. PM 183). Blumenberg's metaphorology is an attempt to shed light on the pre-systematic, background ques-

tions that guide our world understanding and interests; it shares the Kantian claim about the primacy of practical reason.

The difficult question about the relation between metaphorology and metaphysics remains, at this juncture, unresolved; and it is to this question that I now turn.

### 3. Metaphorology and Metaphysics

In the epilogue of *Paradigmen*, Blumenberg touches on the relation between metaphor and metaphysics. This passage, however, refers back to and seems to reflect an introductory statement about metaphors taken literally or, as Blumenberg puts it, metaphors taken 'at face value' (*beim Wort genommen*). Let us therefore try to bring the two passages together:

> Hier hat die Metapher aufgehört, Metapher zu sein; sie ist 'beim Wort genommen', naturalisiert, ununterscheidbar von einer physikalischen Aussage geworden […] Metaphysik erwies sich oft als beim Wort genommene Metaphorik; der Schwund der Metaphysik ruft die Metaphorik wieder an ihren Platz (PM 22; 193)

This passage raises several questions. What does it mean that the "decline" (*Schwund*) of metaphysics calls back the use of metaphors? Is Blumenberg here suggesting a *disjunctive* relation between (absolute) metaphors and metaphysics? My suggestion would be that the relation between metaphysics and metaphorology is indeed more complicated than this disjunction might seem to suggest.

The question about the relation between metaphor and metaphysics is not only of great significance to the evaluation of Blumenberg's metaphorology, it also relates to the overall question about the possibilities of what has been referred to as a 're-metaphorisation of theology' (Stoellger 2000, 325ff) as such, and its implications for an appraisal of the central ideas enclosed in Blumenberg's metaphorology. The lack of explicit systematic-theoretical approaches to the relation between metaphor and metaphysics by Blumenberg makes it all the more relevant to confront his sparse comments with more systematically developed considerations. One of the problems with doing this, however, is that one runs

the risk of equating Blumenberg's metaphorology with other kinds of metaphorology – understood as theories about the (epistemological, cognitive, ontological etc.) status of metaphors – thereby passing over in silence the inventive character of Blumenberg's reflections. The difficult thing about Blumenberg's metaphorology is, as we have seen, that it doesn't appear to be a theory of metaphors at all. Rather, Blumenberg's metaphorology is a strikingly historical enterprise geared towards an investigation of the substructures of thinking, that is, the underlying assumptions, expectations, guiding hopes and presumptions that directs human self- and world-understanding.

My intention in the following is to situate Blumenberg's metaphorology in the French debate on the possibilities of a metaphorology conveyed by Derrida and Ricœur in the 1970's. The main idea is to illuminate the methodological problems related to a metaphorology and shed light on the intricate relation between metaphor and metaphysics.

### 3.1 Derrida and the Impossibility of Metaphorology

The starting point for this controversy between Ricœur and Derrida can be found in Derrida's text *La Mythologie blanche. La métaphore dans le texte philosophique* originally published in *Poétique* 5 in 1971 but republished in *Marges de la philsophie* (1972). Here Derrida's main concern finds its expression as a 'transcendental' question about the *possibilities* of a metaphorology as such. Can philosophy in fact *philosophically* talk about metaphors? More precisely, Derrida's main concern is whether or not philosophy can in fact establish a *general theory of metaphors* without undermining itself. Derrida observes,

> Au lieu de risquer ici des prolégomènes à quelque métaphorique future, essayons plutôt de reconnaître en son principe la *condition d'impossibilité* d'un tel projet. Sous sa forme la plus pauvre, la plus abstraite, la limite serait la suivante: la métaphore reste, par tous ses traits essentiels un philosophème classique, un concept métaphysique. Elle est donc prise dans la champ qu'une métaphorologie générale de la philosophie voudrait dominer. Elle est issue d'un réseau de philosophèmes qui correspondent eux-mêmes à des tropes ou à des

> figures et qui en sont contemporains ou systématiquement solidaires (Derrida 1972, 261)

Derrida here seems to point to two insurmountable obstacles for any metaphorology: a) philosophy is not capable of "controlling" (*dominer*) the metaphor from 'the inside' since it is in itself an unavoidable metaphysical constituent; and b) nor is it capable of controlling it from 'the outside' in some kind of metaphilosophical perspective or discourse simply because it has to necessarily make use of a concept of metaphor that is in itself a philosophical product (Amalric 2006, 15). Metaphors are unavoidably at work 'in' every philosophical discourse (which the formulation of this thesis itself lucidly confirms) which makes Derrida draw the deconstructive inference that a philosophical metaphorology is impossible *ex hypothesi*. One could formulate this *a-poria* (literally meaning: no way, impossible to find a way out) in the following way: If metaphors are not simply rhetorical ornamentation to the philosophical discourse – i.e. if metaphors do not have a purely accidental status but rather play an inescapably constitutive role in philosophy – there can be no *non-metaphorical philosophy of metaphors*. Or, as Derrida puts it: "Ni une *rhétorique* de la philosophie ni une *métaphilosophie* ne paraissent ici pertinentes, telle est donc l'hypothèse" (Derrida 1972, 274).

Thus Derrida's guiding hypothesis is that *metaphor is metaphysics and the use of metaphors is the genesis of metaphysics* (Stoellger 2000, 207). Derrida conjoins this hypothesis with two supplementary considerations or 'counter-hypothesises' centred around the following two fields: a) focusing on the *l'usure* of metaphors meaning the worn-out, harassed or forgotten metaphors in contrast to the use (*l'usage*) of metaphors and b) the impossibility of distinguishing consistently between metaphor and metaphysics (echoing indirectly Nietzsche's famous 'definition' of truth being merely a 'mobile army of metaphors, metonyms and anthropomorphisms') (Nietzsche 1873, 314; Derrida 1972, 258). He seems to argue that the *l'usure* constitutes the very structure and history of the philosophical metaphor itself (Derrida 1972, 249). Both these auxiliary counter-hypothesises give expression to a fundamental *suspicion* in relation to the possibility of a conceptual mastery of metaphor in the philosophical discourse. As Jean-Luc Amalric rightly

has pointed out the most decisive difficulty in relation to Derrida's text seems to be whether and to what extent he affirms or rejects the second hypothesis, namely that metaphysic is necessarily illusory and an imposturous forgery: "la métaphysique croit toucher à la vérité alors qu'elle est enfermée dans le mythe" (Amalric 2006, 19-20). Derrida borrows the term 'white mythology' (*mythologie blanche*) from Anatole France thereby designating that metaphysics is mythology, white mythology, to be precise, in the sense of a prejudiced occidental, i.e. the Western man's belief in a particular, superior rationality.

In a footnote Derrida refers explicitly to §59 in Kant's *Critique of Judgement* (Derrida 1972, 267 (note 16)); interestingly enough it is the exact same paragraph that Blumenberg is referring to in his *Paradigmen*. Derrida, however, only mentions the fact that Kant is making a distinction between two types of the *hypotypose* – a schematic and a symbolic – but does not elaborate in any detail on just what systematic implications this distinction may have. Rather, he continues straight to Hegel's consideration of the relation between concept and metaphor in his *Ästhetik* (§ 3) making this paragraph the point of departure for his own deconstructive advances to metaphysics. In the mentioned paragraph Kant uses the traditional expression of *hypotypose* as term for the 'sensualisation' (*Versinnlichung*) of pure concepts of respectively understanding *(Verstand*) and reason *(Vernunft*). Kant writes,

> Alle Hypotypose (Darstellung, *subiectio sub adspectum*) als Versinnlichung ist zwiefach: entweder schematisch, da einem Begriffe, den der Verstand faßt, die correspondirende Anschauung a priori gegeben wird; oder symbolisch, da einem Begriffe, den nur die Vernunft denken und dem keine sinnliche Anschauung angemessen sein kann, eine solche untergelegt wird, mit welcher das Verfahren der Urtheilskraft demjenigen, was sie im Schematisieren beobachtet, bloß analogisch ist, d.i. mit ihm bloß der Regel dieses Verfahrens, nicht der Anschauung selbst, mithin bloß der Form der Reflexion, nicht dem Inhalte nach übereinkommt (Kant 1790, 458 (B 255))

Here Kant expands on a problem he was already considering in his first critique: The problem concerning the synthesis between *Verstand* and intuition (*An-*

*schauung*). In his transcendental deduction Kant introduced the productive imagination (*produktive Einbildungskraft*) as the key to the mediation between the sensible given and the concepts of the understanding. That Kant *changed* the central role originally ascribed to the productive imagination in the second version of his first critique has been a constant source of debate for commentators and exegetes, but I shall not enter that discussion here. The important thing for present purposes is that the problem treated in *Critique of pure Reason* as a problem about the synthesis between concepts of the understanding and intuition is brought together with the question about the relation between concepts of reason (*Vernunftsbegriffe*) and intuition in the *Critique of Judgement*. It is this relation which Kant now expands by addressing the question about the relation between *Vernunft* and intuition; a question which is relevant to the evaluation of the relation between metaphorology and metaphysics.

In the terminology of Kant the relation between 'intuition' (*Anschauung*) and 'reflective power of judgement' (*reflektierender Urteilskraft*) can be thematically elaborated as a relation between what he calls a *schematic* and a *symbolic* presentation (*exhibitio*). If we are dealing with a *Verstandesbegriff* (a concept grasped by the understanding) then there must be an essentially corresponding intuition to this concept and the presentation is accordingly designated as schematic (since it is given *a priori*). If, on the other hand, we have to do with a *Vernunftsbegriff* (a concept of reason) no sensible intuition can be adequately corresponded (Cf. Kant 1790, 459 (B 254)). Nonetheless, this *Vernunftsbegriff* is *by analogy* ascribed an intuition which corresponds to a *Verstandesbegriff* but which only has the *form of the reflection* in common with the *Vernunftsbegriff*. This latter way of making something sensible is described by Kant as *symbolic presentation* (*symbolische Vorstellungsart*) (Kant 1790, 459 (B 255)). Whereas the first kind of conceptual presentation is direct the second kind is indirect. The main point here is that we according to Kant have certain 'concepts' (which he calls *ideas*) that lack sensible intuition but nevertheless are given a symbolic presentation.

According to Derrida the most prominent place to scrutinise the relation between metaphysics and metaphor can be found in Hegel's dialectical idealism. Hegel's schemes of oppositions (nature/spirit; sensible/intelligible etc.) describes,

Derrida writes, "the space of possibility of metaphysics and the concept of metaphor" (Derrida 1972, 269) and thus indicates the exemplary place for a consideration of the rapport between the two. Derrida refers to Heidegger's famous lecture *Der Satz vom Grund* (1955/1956) where, in chapter six, Heidegger reflects on the relation between metaphor and metaphysics:

> Die Vorstellung von ‚übertragen' und von der Metapher beruht auf der Unterscheidung, wenn nicht gar Trennung des Sinnlichen und Nichtsinnlichen als zweier für sich bestehender Bereiche. Die Aufstellung dieser Scheidung des Sinnlichen und Nichtsinnlichen, des Physischen und Nichtphysischen ist ein Grundzug dessen, was Metaphysik heißt und das abendländische Denken maßgebend bestimmt. Mit der Einsicht, dass die genannte Unterscheidung des Sinnlichen und Nichtsinnlichen unzureichend bleibt, verliert die Metaphysik den Rang der maßgebenden Denkweise. Mit der Einsicht in das Beschränkte der Metaphysik wird auch die maßgebende Vorstellung von der ‚Metapher' hinfällig […] Das Metaphorische gibt es nur innerhalb der Metaphysik (Heidegger 1957, 72)

That the metaphorical is only to be found 'interior' to the frontiers of metaphysic has a background in Heidegger's radical conception of his own all-encompassing "question of being" (*Seinsfrage*) as something fatefully forgotten by Western philosophy over the last two thousand years. Metaphysic – in the definite, singular form (!) – has constantly transferred (*meta-fora*) "Being itself" (*Sein*) into something "being" (*das Seinde*). It has done so by means of a fundamental separation (*krinein*) between the visible and the invisible, the sensual and the supersensual. This fundamental division has brought about a fundamental *crisis* in Western thinking; namely a crisis of oblivion in relation to the most fundamental question at all: The question of Being (*die Seinsfrage*).

Only by conducting the whole history of philosophy on this background can Heidegger orchestrate his idea of a fundamental 'oblivion of Being' (*Seinsvergessenheit*) to which his own be-thinking (*Be-denken*) is the long awaited answer. This, quite frankly, pretentious enterprise constitutes the unspoken background for Heidegger's rather grave generalisations: Not only does he speak of meta-

physic in the definite singular form – as if there were only one form of metaphysics – he also refers to *the* metaphor in the same generalising way (Amalric 2006, 32). What Heidegger frequently refers to as *onto-theology* (using a designation introduced by Kant in the *Critique of pure Reason* (Cf. Kant 1787, 556 (B659)) here forms the conceptual hinterland. According to Heidegger the onto-theological character of Western metaphysics is to be found in its persevering endeavour to ask for the totality of being and identifying this with the unity of beings. To Heidegger, therefore, the most apparent meaning of metaphor simply is a metaphysical one; *metaphysics is fundamentally a way of transferring or transposing a literal sense into a non-literal or figurative sense*. And that is precisely what metaphysics (in Heidegger's understanding of the word) is doing; it discerns the visible and the invisible as two autonomous, independent regions and then it transfers the meaning from the one region (the visible) to the other (the invisible). Now, Heidegger's critique of metaphysics is obviously motivated by his own project of 'fundamental ontology'. If the core problem related to metaphysics is that it transfers 'Being' (*Sein*) into 'beings' (*das Seinde*) – and thereby disregards the 'ontological difference' (Cf. Heidegger 1927, 38) – then it is not surprising that metaphor (as a way of carrying into effect this transfer) cannot be anything but metaphysical. Heidegger's suspicion is that metaphor *disguises* 'Being' by translating 'it' into a foreground appearance, into something (being) and thereby contaminating it with what Derrida refers to as the hegemony of "la métaphysique de la présence" (Derrida 1967, 114).

*Savons-nous ce que signifient*
*monde, vérité, réalité?*

### 3.2 Ricœur and the Metaphorical Truth

Paul Ricœur writes about a "common theoretical core" (*noyau théorique commun*) shared by Derrida and Heidegger, implying that his own critique of Derrida points, simultaneously, towards a critique of Heidegger. In the eighth study of *La Métaphore vive* (1975), Ricœur confronts Heidegger's idea that the metaphorical can only be found within metaphysics. Now, according to Ricœur there is an inerasable difference between poetry and the speculative character of philosophy. Even though philosophy may always make use of metaphorical resources in order to generate meaning during speculative contemplation, this does not mean that it should be taken for poetry:

> Les metaphors du philosophie peuvent bien resembler à celles du poète, en ce qu'elles opèrent comme ces dernières un écart par rapport au monde des objects et du langage ordinaire ; mais elles ne se confondent pas avec les métaphores du poète [...] penser n'est pas poétiser (Ricœur 1975, 395)

Ricœur's main intention is not to deny the (unavoidable) metaphorical substructure of speculative thinking. Rather, he wants to maintain that even though the philosophical concepts are 'informed' by a metaphorical underground, they are not *reducible* to this. In other words, philosophical concepts, however unavoidably charged with metaphorical significations, are not reducible without remainder to their metaphorical signification (Amalric 2006, 42). In so far as they are resistant to a reduction to their metaphorical layers of meaning, they possess a self-dependent autonomy. To be clear, this is not to say that Ricœur claims that metaphors are purely ornamental decoration, mere flowery expressions. If philosophical concepts are not reducible to their metaphorical significations, metaphors similarly are not reducible to a pure allegorical function; they possess a "metaphorical truth" (*verité metaphorique*, Ricœur 1975, 282; 313) thanks to their 'heuristic function', their capability to "re-describe reality" (*redécrire la réalité*,

[13] P. Ricœur: *La métaphore vive*, (Éditions du Seuil: Paris 1975), p. 386.

Ricœur 1975, 11). Ricœur's renowned claim, that some, so-called *living* metaphors afford grounds for what he calls "semantic innovation" (*l'innovation sémantique*, Ricœur 1975, 8; 126-127) seems relevant here. According to Ricœur living metaphors propose an 'imaginative, fictive world' (Ricœur 1975, 288) and thus confronts us with *possible realities* by opening up 'other dimensions of reality' (Ricœur 1975, 187). They possess what Ricœur calls a "surplus of meaning" (Cf. Ricœur 1976). Metaphors provide new, possible meaning by placing the world in a different light. Or rather: By placing *us* in a different relation to the world. According to Ricœur, metaphors do not have reference to *objects* (scientific or real 'facts'), but concern the way we *relate to* such objects, i.e. the way we face or inhabit the world (Cf. Breitling 2006, 88). Ricœur thus seems to share, albeit indirectly, Blumenberg's hypothesis about the *pragmatic* primacy of (absolute) metaphors: Metaphors do not determine (in a Kantian sense) objects, but determine the way we *relate to* them (Cf. TdU 58; PM 25).

An important point introduced by Ricœur deserves particular attention here. According to Ricœur the metaphorical truth of metaphors remains a paradox. The paradox consists in that metaphors on the one hand cannot simply be taken naively to refer to some*thing* (that would be a kind of "ontological naïveté" (321)). On the other hand, however, their reference is neither simply *nothing*, i.e. not purely an 'is not' that can then be 'demythologised' or translated back into clear concepts. Rather, metaphors have, if they are recognised *as* metaphors, a "second order reference" (*référence dédoublée*) (Ricœur 1975, 282). I find this expression helpful in evaluating Blumenberg's metaphorology. I've argued that Blumenberg's metaphorology can be understood as a kind of *second-order reflection*. To be sure, the absolute metaphors have lost their "a-historical innocence" (PM 26) and cannot simply be taken uncritically "at face value" (PM 193), as if they were "physical statements" (PM 22) about the world. Metaphorology is not, Blumenberg explicitly emphasises, a *method* to work out 'answers' to (unanswerable) metaphysical questions. And still the absolute metaphors are not simply declared 'dead', devoid of meaning and significance. If Blumenberg's metaphorology is indeed not an attempt to remove, overcome or eliminate metaphysical themes (Stoellger 2000, 3) what then?

As I've argued, Blumenberg's metaphorology constitutes an on-going *work on* (absolute) metaphors that is, in a sense, made subjects of a kind of *second order naivety*. In *La symbolique du mal* (1960), Ricœur distinguishes between what he refers to as a pre-critical immediacy and a *second* immediacy, a "*seconde naïveté*" (Ricœur 1960, 483) in relation to the understanding of symbols. Blumenberg's metaphorology can, I think, fruitfully be understood with these terms, namely as a "second (…) potentiated reflection" (Konersmann 2007, 14), which deals *indirectly* with the 'answers' contained 'in' absolute metaphors; it doesn't take literally the absolute metaphors with which it deals, but considers them *as* metaphors – without for that reason ignoring their fundamental inevitability. Metaphorology is marked by *an unresolved ambiguity* in relation to the metaphysical questions with which it deals. And this ambiguity (*Zweideutigkeit*) is reflected in Blumenberg's philosophical anthropology (Cf. Dierse 1995, 129): On the one hand, it treats the 'answers' contained in absolute metaphors with intended remoteness, in a horizon of distance. This distance is obtained by treating absolute metaphors within a memorial horizon, i.e. in a *backward-turned, horizontal line of reflection*. On the other hand, this memorial line of reflection is not tantamount to a definitive leave-taking with the questions and answers 'contained' in such absolute metaphors. Blumenberg seems – again with an unmistakable Kantian touch – to acknowledge the existence of an "ineradicable need" (*unausrottbare Bedürfnis*) in humans to have their "last and most comprehensive questions" (*seine letzen und umfassendsten Fragen*) answered (WW 75). And yet, philosophy remains unable to fulfil this need – at least directly, without hesitation.

My definition of metaphysics as 'a question about (certain) questions' (see chapter 2.1) raises the question: Is Blumenberg's metaphorological attempt to avoid answering metaphysical questions feasible? Is metaphorology a purely 'historical' enterprise detached from metaphysics as such – a meta-narrative about the fortunes of metaphysical questions, told through a historical analysis of metaphor – or does it somehow provide answers to the metaphysical questions with which it engages? The answer to this question seems to be a *'both…and'*, which may call to mind Kant's antinomies. On the one hand, Blumenberg treats the questions of metaphysics (including the question of God) in a

rather distant, *historical* perspective. On the other hand, his texts are constantly marked by formulations, conjectures and assumptions which point beyond a purely historical interest, thus giving voice to possibilities carrying a more *systematic* stamp. Moreover, it seems to be an almost constitutive feature of practically all of Blumenberg's texts that they find themselves stuck *between* the (rather sterile) alternative: 'Outside' or 'inside'? Or to express the matter using one of Blumenberg's own metaphors: The texts find themselves in the *space between* the 'distant' *spectator* and the 'entangled' *shipwreck*. The title *Shipwreck with Spectator* (*Schiffbruch mit Zuschauer* (1979)) is therefore not only a central 'paradigm for a metaphor of existence' but may also be appreciated as a 'paradigm' for Blumenberg's own mode of thought: *Cela n'est pas volontaire, vous êtes embarqué*, writes Pascal (Pascal 1670, 677), thereby giving expression to the idea that the spectator is also unavoidably shipwrecked. Following Andrea Borsari, one could call this Blumenberg's 'anthropological antinomy' (Cf. Borsari 1999, 412ff).

Blumenberg anthropological antinomy, its 'double movement' (Borsari 1999, 414) thus seems to reflect the unresolved, indecisive character of Kant's antinomies. According to Borsari, Goethe's words in a letter from March 1827 to his mourning friend Zelter, who lost his only son, quoted and commented in *Work on Myth,* may give us a hint of how Blumenberg's anthropological antinomy should be understood. In order to comfort his friend, Goethe writes that he believes in immortality (*die Unsterblichkeit*) and that the monad is directed to new activities in all eternity. But Goethe retracts his personal transposition *(Umsetzung*) of Kant's postulate of immortality "in the very moment in which he thinks that he has to say this to his mourning friend – retracts it in order to justify the comforting myth":

> Forgive me these abstruse expressions! But people have always lost themselves in such regions, and tried to communicate through such manners of speaking, where reason could not reach but they nevertheless did not want to let unreason rule (WM 400-401/ AM 436-437)

Blumenberg furnishes Goethe's letter with his own remarks:

> No one has ever articulated more precisely why reason admits needs, which it arouses itself, without being able, in its regular discipline, to satisfy them: not in order to acquire secretly, after all, the excess that is denied to it, but in order not to let unreason gain power over the unoccupied space (WM 401/ AM 437)

Here, a pronounced Kantian impulse takes effect. The fact that our understanding (*Verstand*) does not manage all that is demanded by our reason (*Vernunft*) – "Die Vernunft erweckt die Erwartung des Verstandes und enttäuscht sie zugleich" (TdU 40) – as Kant had claimed, seems to provide, albeit indirectly, a key to understanding the relation between metaphorology and metaphysics. Or rather: My claim is that Blumenberg's metaphorology must be seen as *an after-metaphysical work of memory* characterised by balancing *between* the perspective of the uninvolved observer and the engaged participant. I thus agree with Philipp Stoellger's characterisation of Blumenberg's metaphorology: "Die Metaphorologie impliziert eine 'nach-metaphysische' (…) Möglichkeit der Philosophie (…)" (Stoellger 2000, 225). But in what sense is metaphorology after-metaphysical; what does after-metaphysical mean?

### 3.3 After-Metaphysical Considerations: Blumenberg's *Nachdenken*

The expression 'after-metaphysical' is anything but obvious. In his colossal three-volume work, *Das Prinzip Hoffnung,* Ernst Bloch writes: "Je Größer die Worte, desto eher kann sich Fremdes in ihnen verstecken" (Bloch 1959, 614). Bloch's words sit comfortably within an 'end of metaphysics' discourse. The expression after-metaphysical is common currency in modern philosophy of religion (Cf. e.g Habermas 1988; Wrathall 2003). Its ubiquity is nonetheless inversely proportional to its transparency: The meaning of the expression often seems vague, its application obscure. It is not even obvious in what sense 'after' should be taken. Does it mean that we have left something irrevocably behind us, that we are definitively beyond metaphysics? That would presuppose that metaphysics is indeed something 'outside us' that we can divest ourselves of – like a coat or a wrist watch. Besides, it is not clear which kind of metaphysics it is that we (allegedly) have behind us. To speak of 'metaphysic' (in the singular, definite

form) may be rhetorically appealing but it suffers from a tendency to 'liquidate the particular' (*die Liquidation des Besonderen*) (Adorno 1951, 15). Finally, it should be noted that the very discourse of the 'end' (or, as a possible implication, 'the return') of metaphysics' (or of 'God') *itself* seems to constitute a significant metaphysical line of reasoning. It therefore seems necessary to clarify the sense I want to give to this expression.

Mark C. Taylor manages to transcend the obscurities which can sometimes attend his deconstructive analyses, and delivers a cogent summary of the apparently competing connotations of this term 'after' when used in relation to metaphysics:

> But how is *after* to be understood? On the one hand, to come after is to be subsequent to what previously has been, and on the other hand, to be after is to be in pursuit of what lies ahead. Betwixt and between past and future, after is never present as such but is the approaching withdrawal and withdrawing approach that allow presence to be present (Taylor 2007, 345)

The 'past' can be seen, therefore, as a question about the future. Blumenberg's metaphorology is marked by a double movement which resounds in the word 'after': On the one hand, it acknowledges that we "cannot avoid thinking metaphysically" (Grønkjær 2006, 1) and thus seems close to a Kantian position. On the other hand, it seems to constantly abstain from taking the questions and answers of metaphysics at their word by inscribing them in a *horizon of Nachdenklichkeit.*

In a short text from 1980 entitled *Nachdenklichkeit* (ND), Blumenberg introduces a distinction between thinking (*Denken*) and thinking-after *(Nachdenklichkeit*). Thinking is a means to an end, guided by the intention of reaching something or somewhere as directly as possible; thinking is characterised by an attempt to bring about…

> (…) die kürzeste Verbindung zwischen zwei Punkten (…), zwischen einem Problem und seiner Lösung, zwischen einem Bedürfnis und

> seiner Befriedigung, zwischen den Interessen und ihrem Konsens (ND 58)

*Nachdenklichkeit*, on the other hand, is described with the metaphor of detour (*Umweg*) and follows the logic of digression (ND 58). The subject matters presented for consideration in this *Nachdenklichkeit* are what Blumenberg refers to as absolute metaphors. With echoes of Kant's practical philosophy he mentions: Freedom, the existence of God and immortality, but also life and death, sense and nonsense, being and nothingness (ND 61). It is this specific understanding of *nachdenken* as a thoughtful thinking-after, which serves as a model for my understanding of after-metaphysical. My definition is rooted in a certain understanding of the prefix 'after', which is intimately connected to my interpretation of Blumenberg's metaphorology as an after-metaphysical work of memory. The German verb *nach-denken* is usually rendered into English as 'to reflect', 'to think (about)', 'to dwell (on)', 'to ponder' or 'to contemplate'. These different meanings are undeniably expressive of the word *Nachdenklichkeit*. The literal meaning, however, is to think (something) after (*man denkt etwas nach*). The English noun 'after-thought' reflects the idea that something is occurring later, that it comes after. But it can also mean that one realises something new, or that something is seen in a new light: A belated cognitive intervention which has the power to transform that which has been under consideration. In this sense Blumenberg's writings certainly do find themselves committed to an idea of *Nachdenklichkeit*, since they often force their reader to radically revise their understanding of a subject which seemed somehow settled, somehow obvious.

We are now able clarify what is meant by 'after-metaphysical': Blumenberg's metaphorology is after-metaphysical *not* in the sense that it claims that we have (or *can* have) metaphysics *as such* behind us (even though we may, of course, have certain forms of metaphysics behind us). It is after-metaphysical in the sense that it is marked by a backward-turned *nachdenken* which *at the same time* recognises the *changeability and* the *inevitability* of metaphysics. The term 'after-metaphysical' does *not* suggest 'the end of metaphysics'; it rather implies a certain *mode of working* with the questions and answers of metaphysics: It is the

pursuit of that which previously has been in order to 'think after' the possible dimensions of meaning which this has been might still possess.

The way Blumenberg deals with metaphysics is, however, first and foremost visible within the theoretical framework of his so-called *phenomenology of history*. In order to appreciate the theoretical approaches advanced within Blumenberg's phenomenology of history one may fruitfully direct one's attention to his historical model of reception (Adams 1991, 161f) which it established under the heading: "'re-occupation'" (*'Umbesetzung'*). The historical model of reception which Blumenberg argues in favour of could be condensed thus: "History *is* metaphor" (Stoellger 2000, 412). History is metaphor because it is the constant 'carrying-over' (Übertragen, *metaphora*) of questions and problems, interests, hopes and expectations. Even though Blumenberg's model of reception generally focuses on the *continuity* of history (and indirectly seems to turn down any idea of an absolute discontinuous 'after'), the phenomenological aspects of his thinking point in the direction of what one could call a *history of variation*. Gianni Carchia thus argues that Blumenberg's metaphorology is in fact tantamount to a 'phenomenology of infinitely various modes' (*fenomenologia dei modi infinitamente diversi*) and suggests that the chief characteristic of Blumenberg's thinking is its 'brilliant' (*virtuosismo*) application of Husserl's idea of 'profiles' or 'shadings' (*Abschattungen*) to movements in the history of meaning (Carchia 1999, 216-217).

I shall now turn to a discussion of Blumenberg's phenomenology of history. My intention is to show how Blumenberg adopts and transposes a number of phenomenological key categories in his approach to history. My main interest is to identify the implications of adopting these phenomenological categories for an analysis of *history* and *memory*. Some preliminary work will be required, however, before these identifications can be made.

*Es ist das Paradox*
*aller Rezeption, dass der*

*nicht erfährt, der noch*
*nichts erfahren hat*
Blumenberg

**4. Phenomenology of History – History of Variation**

It is the paradox of history that it cannot be understood without that understanding remaining fundamentally historical (Cf. Marion 1980, 6). History cannot be radically transcended or grasped from a privileged external perspective; there is no way to catapult ourselves out of history. Hence, we always find ourselves already situated, 'enclosed' in histories and their numerous receptions. And yet we are not merely mechanical products of history; we seem to avail ourselves of a certain freedom with regard to our historical past. Karl Jaspers has described our historical situation with the paradoxical phrase, "unity of necessity and freedom" (Jaspers 1956, 125). To 'have' history thus means that we don't have to and indeed cannot begin with the beginning (*von vorn anzufangen*). To understand our history, however, also means that we do not have to subject ourselves blindly to our tradition, that we are not sheer products of our past (WW 68). Peter Sloterdijk has suggested a (practically untranslatable) distinction between "Anfangen" and "Amanfanganfangen-können" (Sloterdijk 1998, 35). Whereas the former is unavoidable, the latter is merely a mirage.

'To take history seriously without taking it too seriously' might be an apt characterisation of Blumenberg's phenomenological approach to history. On the one hand, Blumenberg is an exceptionally historical thinker. His thinking is characterised by a deep attachment to history; one might even say that he seeks to infiltrate history. On the other hand, however, his interest always exceeds historical reconstruction. Philosophy, Blumenberg argues, should direct its efforts to the "deconstruction of obviousness" (*Abbau von Selbstverständlichkeiten*) (AAR 114; LT 48). The tool Husserl uses to tear down the wall of the 'unquestionably given', the supposedly self-evident, is the idea of *free variation*. This idea is adopted by Blumenberg and applied to the historical past. That it the reason why one could, I think, fruitfully describe Blumenberg's phenomenology of history as a *history of variation*.

There is a noticeable Cartesian heritage at play in Husserl: The idea that history can be given an absolute beginning. As Blumenberg points out, this idea appears to be "inconsequent" (LT 20), it seems to collide with the fundamental phenomenological point of departure: The intentional structure of consciousness. This intentional structure doesn't allow us to think neither an absolute beginning nor an absolute end. Husserl's "pathos of radical commencement" (LT 25) therefore represents a break with the pivotal phenomenological premise – that consciousness doesn't contain the idea of its own negation. Or to give existential expression to the matter: We do not know what it is that we know when we know that we have to die. And yet we know *that* we have to die. Or, in the words of Blumenberg:

> Einen Anfang in der Zeit können wir nicht denken (….) Paradox ist: wir *wissen*, dass wir sterben müssen, aber wir *glauben* es nicht, weil wir es nicht *denken* können. Nicht anders und nicht weniger paradox ist, das wir *wissen*, angefangen zu haben – weil anfangen worden zu sein –, ohne es *glauben* – weil nicht *denken* – zu können (H 11)

The fact that we cannot think – and never experience – our own beginning or end is bound up in the fundamental *temporal* constitution of consciousness (Cf. ZdS 122; 143-144; BM 40; 133). The temporal structure of consciousness doesn't contain knowledge about its own finitude. Such a knowledge can only be obtained 'from the outside', intersubjectively (BM 406). In other words: We only know our own death through the death of the other.

It is to Husserl's credit that he developed a (technical and fine-meshed) language for our inner time consciousness (Cf. Theunissen 2001, 19). In order to describe the most elementary feature of consciousness, namely that 'all consciousness is consciousness *about* something', Husserl adopted the expression 'intentionality' from his teacher Franz Brentano. The term designates the fundamental *directedness* of consciousness, the mind pointing-beyond-itself. When we think, we think *about* something, when we imagine, we imagine something, when we dream we dream *about* something. In short: All consciousness is about something, directed *at* something. Now, the temporal structure of this directedness is

of a similarly fundamental nature (and therefore almost always passed over unnoticed): Whether we think, imagine, hope, wish, remember or dream it all takes place within our inner time-consciousness (Sommer 1990, 9; 143). In short: Consciousness *is* time-consciousness. Blumenberg insists that this is one of Husserl's most decisive discoveries: "Jedes Bewusstsein ist seinem Wesen nach und damit unerlässlich immanentes Zeitbewusstsein. Kein Schritt, den die Phänomenologie getan hat, ist wichtiger als dieser" (LW 303). Intentionality, the decisive feature of consciousness, 'unfolds' itself in time; consciousness is *essentially* inseparable from time-consciousness. In order to perceive the blue book, that lies on my desk in front of me, *as* a blue book, that is, as *one and the same* intentional object, my different intentional acts must be 'held together' by a continuous inner-time consciousness. Time-consciousness is what makes different 'profiles' or 'shadings' – Husserl's uses the word 'perceptual profiles' (*perzeptive Abschattungen*, cf. Husserl 1900, 590ff; Husserl 1913, 85f; 91) – possible in the first place. The book in front of me is graspable in an infinitely 'determinable' (*bestimmbar*) series of possible perceptions. And yet there always remains what Husserl refers to as a "horizon of determinable indeterminateness" (*ein Horizont bestimmbarer Unbestimmtheit*, Husserl 1913, 92; Cf. Moran 2008, 274). In order to grasp the book as numerically identical (as one and the same book and not as disjointed, perceptive fragments) my different perceptual profiles must be synthetically integrated. And this synthesis presupposes temporal unification. Thus, intentionality is intimately connected with time-consciousness (ZdS 122; 136; 266).

At this point it may seem like we have lost hopelessly track of the subject-matter. What do these obscure technical phenomenological considerations have to do with history? How is phenomenology to be attached to history? One could, I think, translate these two questions into another one: What is contained in Blumenberg's idea of a phenomenology of history (*Phänomenologie der Geschichte* e.g. E 6; DGT 78; H 549; Aus 202)? Several commentators have underlined Blumenberg's affinity to a number of basic phenomenological ideas (Cf. e.g. Behrenberg 1994, 1; Stoellger 1998, 139; Carchia 1999, 216; Hundeck 2000, 311ff). The most important theoretical tools adopted by Blumenberg from phenomenology are: *life-world, distance, free variation, intentionality* and *inner-time*

*consciousness*. It is to these guiding concepts of phenomenology – which are adopted and applied on the course of the 'history of meaning and significance'[14] as such – that we must now turn our attention.

### 4.1 Retention, Protention and Primal Impression

Husserl's analyses of inner time-consciousness are of particular relevance to the following considerations. Presence always has a certain 'extension' or 'width'; it is not a single instant or a chain of distinctively separated atomic time particles. In his in-depth analyses of time-consciousness, Husserl introduces a number of important distinctions; the most crucial of these is the distinction between primal impression, retention and protention (Cf. Husserl 1928). In the last volume of his trilogy, *Temps et récit* (1983-1985), Paul Ricœur rates *retention* as one of Husserl's most important discoveries (Ricœur 1985, 51): Any 'now' – any 'primal impression' (*Urimpression*) – has a partly retentional background which provides it with a past-directed context, something that is retained 'in the now'; partly a protentional aspect that provides the primal impression with a future-orientated, anticipatory field. Inner time consciousness thus has a Janus face: Its formal structures divided into retention and protention (Sommer 1990, 159). Had our time-consciousness been atomistic, then we would have been unable to understand phrases or hear melodies. That this is *not* the case is due, metaphori-

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[14] This expression (which partly alludes to Karl Löwiths book *Meaning in History* (1949), partly to Dilthey's expression *Bedeutsamkeit*), is my own title suggestion for Blumenberg's philosophical enterprise. It is an attempt to translate the German expression *Bedeutungsgeschichte*, where *Bedeutung* seems to cover both 'meaning' and 'significance'. Blumenberg adopts the term *Bedeutsamkeit* (which Robert Wallace has translated with 'Significance' (Cf. WM 59ff)) from Erich Rothacker who formulated his 'principle of significance' (*Satz der Bedeutsamkeit*) saying that in "man's historical world of culture (*Kulturwelt*) things have 'valences' (*Wertigkeiten*) for attention and for vital distance different from those they have in the objective world of things studied by the exact sciences, in which the distribution of subjective value tends, in the norm, toward zero (…) Significance is related to finitude (*Endlichkeit*)" (WM 67/AM 77 see also: Leg 12-14).

In this light, it seems reasonable to say that Blumenberg's main concern is how human beings handle their finitude through the investment of meaning and significance in the human worlds.

cally speaking, to the 'non-punctual depth' of presence: Any presence is tacitly overlaid by the just-past that precedes it. It is important to note that retention is *not* identical with memory, even though both are related to the past.

The reason for this is that any memory of a particular past event does not simply have a punctual, momentary character; it *also* unfolds itself on a retentional background. Just as any perception has a "perceptive background" (*Wahrnehmungshintergrund*), Husserl ascribes to memory (*Erinnerung*) a corresponding memorial background (*Erinnerungshintergrund*), i.e. it has its 'fields' (*Hof*) of retentions and protentions (Husserl 1913, 257). 'Background' is, Husserl explains, the title for *potential* 'positions' (*Setzungen*), i.e. the field of unfolded, 'accompanying' (*miterscheinende*) possibilities (Husserl 1913, 257). Protention, on the other hand, means that any 'now' is characterised by an immediate near-expectation of what follows. Any sentence, for instance, creates ... Yes, what? – A field of different, possible options, i.e. a horizon of more or less indefinite ways in which the sentence can be continued (Sommer 1990, 158). Protention thus represents an 'imaginative anticipation' of what follows the currently given. Just like retention is not identical with memory, although they both relate to the past, protention is not identical with expectation, although both relate to the future. Hence, any experience has, according to Husserl, a common temporal structure "such that any moment of experience contains a retentional reference to past moments of experience, a current openness (primal impression) to what is present, and a protentional anticipation of the moments of experience that are just about to happen" (Gallagher/Zahavi 2008, 78). These are the structural features of *any* conscious act. But what do these technical considerations have to do with history?

Just like an intentional object is always accompanied by a tacit awareness of its horizon of absent profiles, history unfolds on the background of something that is not explicitly present, but nevertheless constitutes the tacit horizon on which the actual took place. Just as our vision does not have a clear endpoint, but is characterised by fluid limits, our inner time-consciousness is marked by the absent, yet silently accompanied profiles. The present is not an atomic particle detached from the next, but a *horizon* of past and future.

Transitions are always on a continuum, without discrete leaps. The past thus flows imperceptibly into the actual given. When we recall something of the past, we also recall the options that were *not* realised. When looking back at a threatening situation, from which I only escaped with good fortune, I not only remember what *actually* happened – that I escaped the lorry's impact – I also remember what *could have had* happened: That the turning lorry could have crushed me. What I remember is not primarily the actual course of events, but rather the fear attached to the *possibility* of what could have happened. Or with one of Blumenberg's own examples from *Die Vollzähligkeit der Sterne* (VS): It is not until daytime sounds have faded and the stillness of the night has taken over that the running well becomes noticeable. Or with a variation: When the hand of the thirsty wanderer interrupts the flow of the well's running water, it wakes the locals because it draws attention to the existence of that which has been hidden beneath its own noise. Not until the permanent environmental background is interrupted or falls silent is it actually noticed (VS 13-15). Not only does the 'real' always take place on a background of tacit obviousness; it is also enacted on a background of unfolded possibilities. It is these unfolded possibilities that constitute the main interest of Blumenberg's metaphorology.

History is not just the 'intentional object' of Blumenberg's writings, that towards which he often directs his attention. It also, on a more profound level, constitutes the 'intentional background'. In his late work, *Die Krisis der Europäischen Wissenschaften und die Transzendentale Phänomenologie* (1936), Husserl speaks about the "comprehensive collective consciousness" (*übergreifende Gemeinschaftsbewusstsein*) that partly consists of "the already experienced" (*schon erfahrene*), and partly forms an "open horizon of possible experience" (*offener Horizont möglicher Erfahrungen*, Husserl 1936, 166f). It is this inclusion of history and tradition of phenomenology that forms the background of Blumenberg's phenomenology of history. In a lecture held in Cologne in 1959, Blumenberg makes the observation that Husserl, in his late work, made approaches to expand intentionality to history and tradition. Blumenberg writes:

> Entscheidend ist aber nun, dass Husserl in seinem Spätwerk den in der Intentionalität des Bewusstseins gefundenen Ansatz auf die *Geschichte* ausdehnt. Hier erst bekommt die Horizontstruktur ihren vollen Sinn: das in aller Erfahrung Mitgegenwärtige kann nun die Erinnerung einer ganzen Kulturgemeinschaft sein, ihr Traditionsbesitz, aber auch ihre in die Zukunft gerichteten Erwartungen, die von einem ganz bestimmt geprägten Möglichkeitsbewusstsein abhängig sind (LT 20)

'Tradition' is now understood as the result of a kind of *cultural memory* that is actively forming our self- and world understanding, and at the same time framing a certain horizon of expectation and possibility. The term 'cultural memory' has become a key category of interpretation within the last two or three decades. Thanks to the significant studies of Jan and Aleida Assmann the idea of cultural memory has gained prominence in the vast field of cultural and biblical studies and offered helpful models of understanding in relation to the dynamics of tradition and the dialectics between memory and history, between remembering and forgetting the past. In some ways this 'turn to memory' resembles the so-called linguistic turn within philosophy. As Assmann points out in the English translation of what was originally published in German under the title *Religion und kulturelles Gedächtnis* (2000, English 2006)…

> The theory of cultural memory, which amounts to a kind of "ontological turn in tradition", could be summarised with the words "Being that can be remembered is text" (…) If hermeneutics defines man as a being that understands, the exploration of cultural memory defines this understanding being as one who remembers. Gadamer himself has repeatedly argued that all understanding is nurtured by a pre-understanding that comes from memory (Assmann 2006, ix-x)

In light of the previous considerations, it is tempting to apply the phenomenological terms already introduced to a broader understanding of history. But there are reasons to resist any urge to identify the retentional and protentional structures of consciousness with 'historical memory' and 'expectation' respectively. Why? Because in relation to the broader field of history, the two phenomenol-

ogical concepts (retention and protention) retain an attractive hermeneutical significance and remain important for the understanding of memory. Not only is memory not identical with retention since there can be no memory without retention; the (intentional) object of our memory is not an 'isolated' instant, but always-already 'played out' on a retentional background surface and having a protentional field of anticipation. It is therefore important to distinguish retention and protention, which are 'intrinsic' features of any conscious act, from remembrance and expectation (Cf. Gallagher/Zahavi 2008, 79). Thus, in order to remember, my memory must posses a certain *structure* which is described by retention and protention, but not identical with them (Cf. Sommer 1987, 180).

As we have already seen, Blumenberg transposes the Kantian catalogue of questions according to the world-concept into a peculiar past tense (Cf. p. 38ff). This temporal modulation of the Kantian questions is characteristic of his approach to history and marks a way to address the metaphysical questions of the past. These questions not only function as a key to the lost worlds of meaning and significance, which we have left behind; they also allow a re-opening of possibilities within the whispering depths of the history of metaphysics. Whenever we throw a look back at history, we are inevitably confronted with what Ricœur has called a "surplus of meaning" (Cf. Ricœur 1976). Not only are we faced with real alternatives of the past, but also with the alternative realities, i.e. the *possible* realities, that which 'could have been' (*ce qui pourrait avoir lieu*, Ricœur 1985, 346). One could express the matter as follows: When recalling things of the past, we inevitably remember it in its *horizon of retention and protention* thus at the same time implicitly recalling that which could have been.

The phenomenological idea of an infinitely variable multitude of aspects in regard to human experience reflects the idea that history itself is a historically and persceptively changeable product of reflection. A phenomenology of history therefore *also* aims – Blumenberg uses the words of Karl Jaspers – at "transferring once again what has actually happened into possibility" (VdN 91). This transference into possibility inevitably activates *imagination*. In other words: Memory and imagination are closely connected with each other. There are several reasons for this.

### 4.2 Imaginative Variations

Blumenberg's phenomenological history of variation is not a variation of anything; it is a variation of certain questions - or rather: An attempt to make certain certainties uncertain (Cf. Leg 16; Moxter 1999, 196). Why are Blumenberg's imaginative variations of the past not completely arbitrary? Because memory is not something purely intentional. We do not freely choose *what* we remember. This fact has to do with our inability to voluntarily forget (everything), and with our inability to voluntarily remember (everything). It is the result of the constitutive *dialectics* between memory and forgetting: "Der Mechanismus der Geschichte ist ein Widerspiel von Erinnerung und Vergessen (…)" (EmS 117). Reason is the attempt to control the dialectics between memory and forgetting – the question is: Is it able to? (EmS 117).

Memory's productive capacity might well be said to be a result of its inaccuracy (*Ungenauigkeit*). The inaccuracy of memory should, however, not be conceived of as a deplorable lack or deficit. Rather, inaccuracy is an unavoidable *phenomenological* consequence of the perspectivity of our consciousness and thus related to the intentional structure of human perception. Blumenberg speaks about "memory's wonderful inaccuracies" that functions as a precondition for "a licence and desire to a free variation" (H 557) and thus gives leeway to alternative imaginations of our past. Michael Moxter has pointed out that description is necessarily inaccurate because the phenomena that we describe are only real (*wirklich*) within a horizon of variation (Moxter 1999, 187). Manfred Sommer voices the same thought when he claims: "Was war und was ist und was sein wird, steht immer in einem Horizont anderer Möglichkeiten" (Sommer 1989b, 135). In *Matthäuspassion*, Blumenberg introduces the metaphor 'horizon' and makes the following remarks, which may be regarded as a kind of methodological hint about his own phenomenological enterprise:

> Einseitigkeit ist das Schicksal aller Wahrnehmung. Jede Präsenz ist auf den Leitfaden der 'Abschattungen' angewiesen, der das im Gegebene entzogene – nach dem Muster der Horizontmetapher - als

> das 'Mitspielende' annahmt: Offenheit zum Abwesenden hin zu wahren, weil und insofern es das nie ganz Abwesende ist (M 8)

To vary the phenomena within a certain horizon is not the same as complete arbitrariness. Even though memory doesn't insist, as Blumenberg writes, "auf dem, was wirklich gewesen" (H 423) it does not imply that the past is simply handed over to complete coincidence. In a text on the French poet Paul Valéry (1871-1945), Blumenberg indirectly seems to oppose the idea that memory is understood purely "als das Organ des Faktischen" rather than as "einem Medium der poetischen Freiheit" that allows a "Rückverwandlung des Wirklichen in den Horizont seiner Möglichkeiten" (SP 150-151). Blumenberg's phenomenology of history is an attempt to undertake such a re-transformation of the real into its horizon of possibilities.

Blumenberg's phenomenology of history is less about outlining alternative historical courses of events than pointing to the absent horizons of meaning and shedding light on the unfolded possibilities that frame the 'actual given'. It reflects what Ricoeur has referred to as a "*l'entrecroisement* de l'histoire et la fiction" (Ricoeur 1985, 330). This intertwinement of history and fiction is based on the fact that fiction, on the one hand, has a quasi-historical character and that history, on the other hand, has a quasi-fictive character. One of the aims of fiction is to retrospectively release (*libérer rétrospectivement*) certain non-realised possibilities (*possibilities non effectuées*) in the historical past (Ricoeur 1985, 346f). Ricoeur therefore speaks about the quasi-fictional being a "detecteur des *possibles enfouis dans le passé effectif.* Ce qui « aurait pu avoir lieu » - le vraisemblable selon Aristote – recouvre à la fois les potentialities du passé « réel » et les possibles « irréels » de la pure fiction" (Ricoeur 1985, 347). The intertwinement of history and fiction implies that any representation of the historical past is inevitably conjoined with imaginative variations (Ricoeur 1985, 348). What Blumenberg's metaphorology illustrates is that history is always a historically and perspectively changeable product of reflection. It is always possible to uncover alternative aspects and dimensions of it. Metaphorology is an 'imaginative-memorial science of possibilities (*Möglichkeitswissenschaft*)' (Stoellger 2000, 419):

The attempt to rethink what has been, in terms of how it could have been, in order to thereby make visible alternative, historical leeways and self-understandings. Metaphorology thus aims at re-opening the horizons of possibilities and interpretative leeways, which are generally left unnoticed in the history of ideas because of its tendency to consider the past from an one-sidedly backwards perspective.

### 4.3 History as Self-preservation

Blumenberg suggests understanding "historical life" in terms of the "principle of self-preservation" (LM 464/LN 539). Now, the "principle of self-preservation" (*Prinzip der Selbsterhaltung*) sounds rather organic – as if history were a quasi-biological system striving at maintaining itself. What does Blumenberg mean with this peculiar metaphor? Jürgen Goldstein has pointed out that Blumenberg's understanding of history is defined by this very principle of preservation, by what he calls an "Anthropologisierung der Geschichte" (Goldstein 1999, 212). As far as I can see, his hypothesis should be understood as a claim about the (*functional*) *identity maintenance of history through memory*. Moreover, what makes Blumenberg's approach to history qualifiable as *anthropological* is in fact the significant role that memory plays in regard to human self-preservation: Without memory I would be splintered into an endless row of unconnected atoms and my identity would – if it makes sense at all to speak about 'identity' any longer – be disintegrated, fatally fragmented. In other words: *Without memory no consciousness*. Memory thus functions as a constitutive reference point for our sense of reality; it defines what we experience as 'real'. The 'reality-defining' character of memory becomes particularly apparent if one imagines the consequences of its dissolution.

In Christopher Nolan's psychological thriller, *Memento* (2000), the main figure, Leonard Shelby, suffers from anterograde amnesia. He is unable to store new memories after the event that caused his amnesia in the first place: The attack on his wife. In order to cope with this situation he tattoos himself, stores photographs and is hanging notes all over his hotel room. Because he lost complete track of his past, his future is also lost: "The disruption of his past also dis-

rupts his future – what projects could count as important for him are determined by his past experience, so if his past experience is entirely wiped out, so is a meaningful future" (Gallagher/Zahavi 2008, 71).

When Leonard Shelby wakes up in an anonymous hotel room he finds himself completely oblivious to his surroundings: "So where are you? You're in some motel room. You just - you just woke up and you're in - in a motel room. There's the key. It feels like maybe it's just the first time you've been there, but perhaps you've been there for a week, three months. It's - it's kind of hard to say. I don't - I don't know. It's just an anonymous room" There is something strange about waking up. In this regard, Shelby's situation is not that different from our normal situation as one might think. The situation of waking up displays our essential dependency on memory. As Blumenberg has pointed out (Cf. BG 148-149), the peculiar similarities between death, sleep and forgetting are located in their fundamental inability to be experienced. My death is never the object of my own experience (Cf. Merleau-Ponty 1945, 249) just like I never experience the *transition* from being soundly asleep to being awake. Rather, I wake up almost *as if* I had never been before; *as if* the world disclosed itself to me for the very first time. But a certain bagatelle "prevents me from being this completely new beginning: my memory" (BG 148). I remember others, just like others remember me. Had it not been for my remembrance – "of other people, specific situations, certain circumstances, things and words" (BG 148) – my refusal to draw the conclusion that I inhabited an entirely new existence would have lacked a solid foundation. Nothing would have prevented me from forming the presumption that I were an absolute new beginning – had it not been due to my memory of the past.

Memory thus functions as a constitutive factor in establishing reality; it enacts and defines reality by forming our expectations and allowing re-identification. If the disintegration of memory fatally stigmatizes our self-preservation, the same could be said about history: History is self-preservation through the remembrance of questions that, once raised, retain significance through time. Or should on perhaps rather say: Through the *retention* of questions? The suggested *difference* between memory and retention could perhaps be

extracted here: Whereas retention points to the *structural level* of any conscious act and therefore characterises the *necessary* aspects of any intentional directedness, memory is marked by *plasticity*, that is, by a higher degree of imaginative freedom. The necessary aspects of history thereby seem to consist in the tacitly adopted retentional background of questions, whereas any work of memory unavoidably involves a certain degree of imaginative freedom. To summarise: The unity of necessity and freedom which characterises history can be understood as difference between retention and memory.

### 4.4 Epochs and Transitions

According to Blumenberg there is an asymmetrical relation between historically transmitted questions and answers: "In history the price we pay for the great critical freedom in regard to the answers is the nonnegotiability of the questions" (LM 69/LN 80). The German word "Unabdingbarkeit", which Robert Wallace has translated with nonnegotiability, also means indispensability or that which, in a sense, is difficult to escape. Blumenberg's historical model of understanding is distinguished by its focus on the complex relationship between questions and answers, expectations and their fulfilment or disappointment. He speaks about the "mortgage of predescribed questions" (*Hypothek der vorgegebenen Fragen*) (LM 65/LN 75) and refers to the "carry-over of questions" (*Fragenüberhang*) (LM 66/LN 76) that impose on us to work out matching answers. Certainly, Blumenberg does not mean to say that there is an unchanging register of eternal questions. As he explains,

> We are going to have to free ourselves from the idea that there is a firm canon of the 'great questions' that throughout history and with an unchanging urgency have occupied human curiosity and motivated the pretension to world and self-interpretation (LM 65/LN 75)

Even though questions are not eternally given or unchanging the "longevity of a system of questions" (*die Überständigkeit des Systems der Fragen*), i.e. the "pressure of problems" (*Problemdruck*) (LM 65/LN 75) constitutes what Reinhart Koselleck – using an expression originally introduced by Husserl (Husserl 1936,

165; Cf. Ricoeur 1985, 313) – refers to as a "horizon of expectations" (*Erwartungshorizont*) (Koselleck 2000, 349-375). The point here is, that the 'horizon of expectations' seem to be of a significantly less variable character than the formulated answers to these questions. Questions are, Blumenberg argues, relatively more constant in comparison to their answers. The aforementioned anthropological relevance of rhetoric seems here to find its realisation in history: "Die 'Umbesetzungen', aus denen Geschichte besteht, werden rhetorisch vollzogen" (AAR 121). Here, the relation between metaphor and Blumenberg's model of reception is voiced: Expectations, hopes and pre-reflective anticipations are carried over (*metafora*) and 'implemented' rhetorically. Rhetoric (taken in a very broad sense) is the functional placeholder for pre-reflective expectations; it prescribes a certain grammar of expectation or "elementary assertion needs (*elementarer Aussagebedürfnisse*), notions of the world and the self" (LM 469/LN 545).

The 'new' in history can neither be something completely arbitrary nor something absolute simply because it must be formulated on a background of pregiven questions and expectations. It is subject to a predetermined "rigor of expectations and needs" *(einer Strenge vorgegebener Erwartungen und Bedürfnisse*) (LM 466/LN 541) which cannot be eliminated through purely rational procedures. Blumenberg's intention is not to fabricate a 'metaphysical metasystem of history' (*Metaphysik eines Metasystems*) (LM 466/LN 542) or to establish a new, grandiose philosophy of history. Rather, he argues in favour of a *vague* historical continuity which finds its *raison d'être* in what he describes with his model of 'reoccupation' (a word that he always encloses within quotation marks, drawing explicit attention to its own metaphorical status). Inspired by Ernst Cassirer's distinction between concepts of substance (*Substanzbegriff*) and concepts of functions (*Funktionsbegriff*), Blumenberg wishes to replace any idea of historical substantialism that presupposes the existence and transposition (*Umsetzung*) of essential content, with an idea of functional reoccupation. He therefore speaks not about 'substance' but about a "reoccupation of systematic functions" (*Umbesetzung von Systemfunktionen*) (LM 78/LN 88) or "answer positions" (*Positionen von Antworten*). The term 'reoccupation' (*Umbesetzung*) refers to both answers and questions and their specific positions (*Stellen*) in the relatively constant, but

not unchanging system of human world- and self-interpretation. Nevertheless, questions seem to possess a greater degree of resistance against change than answers. The term 'reoccupation' is defined as follows:

> The concept of 'reoccupation' designates, by implication, the minimum of identity that it must be possible to discover, or at least to presuppose and to search for, in even the most agitated movement of history [*in der bewegsten Bewegung der Geschichte*]. In the case that systems are made out of Goethe's *Welt und Menschenansicht*, reoccupation means that different statements can be understood as answers to identical questions (LM 466/LN 541; translation slightly modified, UHR)

We do not seem to choose, from a position of unqualified freedom, the questions we are confronted with. "Expectation is the implication of memory" (DM 38-39). Not being able to forget also means that we have to live with expectations, wishes and hopes that cannot be obliterated simply by purely 'rational' procedures. Moreover, memory is not something purely intentional. As already pointed out, we do not decide completely free and unbound *what* we remember. To formulate the matter on a conceptually grand canvas: We do not choose whether or not to be confronted with the idea of God – just as we do not choose or rules of grammar except by means of grammar. Can the empty space created by the death of God remain vacant? Blumenberg doubts it: "Es gibt die Vakanz nicht; der geschichtliche *horror vacui* ist übermächtig" (M 307). How are we supposed to understand that?

A passage from *The Legitimacy* might shed some helpful light on this question. As we have seen, the relation between answers and questions is understood through the functional model of reoccupation. The basic hermeneutical claim – that in order to understand something one must understand it as an answer to a question – is challenged by Blumenberg (although not rejected). It is not always that the questions precede the answers. Sometimes the answers are 'given' in advance, i.e. sometimes a given answer sets the scene and thus determines the possibilities of articulating the appropriate question to this pre-given, acutely active answer (LM 66/LN 76). Such anonymous assumptions and tacit

presuppositions can be located particularly well in the history of Christian metaphysics. Blumenberg mentions the immediate expectation of "eschatology (…) the doctrine of the Creation or original sin" (LM 66/LN 76). These intellectual arrangements exemplify 'answers' that precede their questions. And it belongs to the very nature of a theology that not "all questions can be asked" (M 148). In a review from 1958, *Epochenschwelle und Rezeption*, Blumenberg claims that the eschatological immediate expectation cannot be a historical product since it *per definitionem* is something completely new – namely an expectation of something which nobody has ever experienced (ER 105). The undefined nature of such immediate experience – its formal indefiniteness, one could say – makes it something which is exceptionally in need of reception. Its formal feature is that *everything* is going to be different – and he "who asks how has already lost his chance to participate" (LM 67/LN 77). History also means to live with expectations regarding what we think we know, what we need to know, and what we can know. Questions, once raised, seem to suggest that

> When the credibility and general acceptance of (…) answers dwindle away, perhaps because inconsistencies appear in the system, they leave behind them the corresponding questions, to which then new answers become due. Unless, perhaps, it turns out to be possible to destroy the question itself critically and to undertake amputations of the system of world explanation. That this cannot be a purely rational operation is a lesson of history, if it is a lesson of anything (LM 66/LN 76)

It belongs to the very nature of consciousness that it can only grasp itself by withdrawing itself (*unter Entzug*) from its beginning and end. It thereby hands itself over to perspective infinity *(einer perspektivischen Uendlichkeit*) (DVP 68; Cf. BM 893)). As Kasper Lysemose has demonstrated, Blumenberg seems to apply this phenomenological insight onto history itself (Cf. Lysemose 2007, 38): In history there are no absolute beginnings but only more or less imperceptible transitions that only stand out in a retrospective perspective: "Geschichte heißt, dass es keine Anfänge nach dem Anfang gibt" (LW 356). One of the most concise formulas in regard to Husserl's concept of consciousness therefore is, according

to Blumenberg, found in Husserl's words: "Bewusstsein besteht durch und durch aus Bewusstsein" (ZdS 145). Consciousness is, seen from 'within', *immanently infinite* (Lysemose 2007, 38); it doesn't begin at any particular point just like it doesn't end at any one either. To translate Husserl's words about consciousness into history thereby giving voice to a characteristic feature in Blumenberg's phenomenology of history: *History consists out-and-out of history*. As Blumenberg remarks:

> Historiographical cognition (*Historische Erkenntnis*) – how could it be otherwise? – is ill-disposed toward the notion of absolute beginnings: To understand history as a result of history means that every phenomenon has to be traced back to what 'was already there' (*was 'immer schon da gewesen' ist*) (LM 470/LN 546, translation slightly modified, UHR)

This becomes particularly evident in regard to the question about *historical epochs*. Blumenberg is, of course, painfully aware that epochs are not crude facts, independent of interpretation. To raise the question whether something or somebody belongs to the "Middle Ages" rather than "the Modern era" is, he writes, to concern ourselves with "sterile questions" (*sterile Fragestellungen*) that completely overlook the fact that "eras" are synthetically produced categories brought about by the historians themselves (CU 10-11). Epochs are nominal conceptual contrast foils designed to produce contrast in relation to a particular, historical self-understanding.

> There are no witnesses to changes of epoch. The epochal turning is an imperceptible frontier, bound to no crucial date or event. But viewed differentially, a threshold marks itself off, which can be ascertained as something either not yet arrived at or already crossed (LM 469/LN 545)

Any historical account makes obvious that the idea of absolute beginnings in history is nothing but a speculative *fata morgana*. History knows of no absolute zero points; just like inner time-consciousness does not possess any distinct

points of transgression and doesn't know of its own beginning or end. Nevertheless, the idea of epochs should not simply be given up as irrelevant because they serve a basic human "need for suggestiveness" (*Prägnanzbedürfnis*" (LM 461/LN 536). Even though the concept of an epoch does not have an unambiguous *fundamentum in re*, it still fulfils (at least occasionally) our 'need to find meaning in history' (*Sinnbedürfnis*) (LM 461/LN 536). In other words, the idea of epochs may not have any 'objective' foundation, but it still holds an existentially important "mythical suggestiveness" (*mythischen Prägnanz*). By transferring the phenomenological insight into the infinitely temporal flow of inner-conscious onto history, the following remarkable features are made visible: Epochal turnings are always *limit concepts* which mark fluid transitions; they are never tokens of absolute beginnings. Furthermore, such epochal changes are not conceivable until we find ourselves at a certain *distance* to them. This reflects a basic feature of consciousness; namely the fact that consciousness is only possible by having a certain distance to its objects. The phenomenological term for such an achievement of distance is *intentionality*. Intentionality thus means "dass ich zu tun habe mit dem und gerichtet bin auf das, was ich nicht selbst bin" (ZdS 122); intentionality is a "form of possessing" (*Besitzform*) something without becoming it (Cf. ZdS 127).

What constitutes the *relative* identity of history – abstractly speaking: Its unity of identity and difference – is what one could call the *endurance of questions*. This, again, depends on the asymmetrical relation between questions and answers – the fact that questions continue to exist even though their corresponding answers are repealed or lost. As already touched upon questions *are* expectations that to a large extent determine what we see (Cf. HD, 203; DVN 115). Or in the striking words of Alexandre Koyré: One does not look as long as one doesn't know that there is anything to see; and particularly not as long as one knows that there is nothing to see (Koyré 1961, 351). Were one to express the matter in phenomenological terms one could say that the primacy of questions in comparison to their answers reflects the *dominance of retention* in regard to inner time-consciousness (Cf. Hundeck 2000, 311ff). It reflects the asymmetrical relation between retention and protention; the fact that every present 'now' is

always-already retentionally displaced and that perception therefore, as Markus Hundeck suggests, basically *is* remembrance (Hundeck 2000, 324).

Hence, the 'primacy of retention' in regard to inner time-consciousness corresponds with the 'primacy of questions' in regard to history. With this we turn to Blumenberg's historical model of reception.

### 4.5 Functional Re-Occupation

It has often been noticed that Blumenberg adopts Ernst Cassirer's distinction between 'concepts of substance' and 'concepts of function' introduced in his work *Substanzbegriff und Funktionsbegriff* from 1910. In this "unausgeschöpften und weithin zu Unrecht vergessenen Werk" (EC 164), Cassirer introduces some important conceptual distinctions that remain important to Blumenberg. From Cassirer's point of view, transition (*Übergang*) never means that "a fundamental form (*eine Grundgestalt*) absolutely disappears while another absolutely new one takes its place (*während eine andere an ihre Stelle absolute neu entsteht*). The new form must contain the answer to the questions proposed within the older form" (Cassirer 1910, 289; Cf. Adams 1991, 158).

It is not the material content which constitutes identity in transition, but the systematic *relation* between questions and answers. Historical identity should not be thought of in terms of essence or substance, but as relational equivalence on a functional level. In the first 'analogy of experience', Kant argues that in order to distinguish old from new it is necessary to presuppose a principle of the permanence of substance (*Grundsatz der Beharrlichkeit der Substanz*). In order to speak intelligibly about change it is a transcendental requirement to presuppose a substantial identity, i.e. one needs to presuppose "the identity of the Substratum" in which all change has its "continuous unity" (*durchgängige Einheit*) (Kant 1787, 223 (B 229)). Blumenberg acknowledges that the problem of epochs must be related to the possibility of experiencing them, i.e. to the question of relative constancy. But he calls into question the necessity of understanding this constancy *substantially*:

> All change, all succession from old to new, is accessible to us only in that it can be related – instead of to the "substance" of which Kant speaks – to a constant frame of reference, by whose means the requirements can be defined that have to be satisfied in an identical 'position' (LM 466/LN 541)

What constitutes history in its unity of identity and difference is not an underlying substantial tradition, a continuity of content, but rather the *inertia of questions* that – once awakened – carry out a 'pressure' in regard to human expectations, needs and hopes. When Pierre Bourdieu speaks about 'retardation' (*hystérésis*)[15] in regard to our social behaviour – the fact that our behavioural system of dispositions hold a considerable amount of duration and cannot simply be changed or wiped out deliberately – he seems to give voice to the 'social' counterpart to Blumenberg's idea regarding history: The functional framework (*Bezugsrahmen*) of positions of questions hold a permanence, intertia or a durability (*Dauerhaftigkeit*) that induces certain expectations and needs that cannot simply be left unoccupied. The decisive point here seems to be that Blumenberg wants to rethink historical identity on a functional level thereby avoiding substantial presumptions. Blumenberg explicitly denies talking about a catalogue of 'eternal', a-historical philosophical questions:

> Here we are not dealing with the classical constants of philosophical anthropology, still less with the 'eternal truths' of metaphysics. The term 'substance' was to be avoided in this context because every type of historical substantialism – such as is involved in, for instance, the theorem of secularization – relates, precisely, to the contents which are shown in the process of 'reoccupation' to be incapable of this very permanence. It is enough that the reference-frame conditions have greater inertia for consciousness than do the contents associated with them, that is, that the questions are relatively constant in comparison to the answers (LM 466/LN 541-542)

[15] The term is derived from ὑστέρησις, an ancient Greek word meaning 'lagging behind', 'to come late', 'be behind'. Magnetic hysteresis means the 'influence' of the previous history or treatment of a body on its subsequent response to a given force or changed condition.

This approach involves a focus on both the inner-systematic *relation* between questions and answers and, just as important, the extension respectively contraction of the *system* of questions and answers. Change, in other words, can take place on two different levels (Cf. Ruh 1980, 82ff): The relation between questions and answers may change, e.g. certain questions "are no longer posed, and the answers that were once provided for them have the appearance of pure dogma, of fanciful redundancy" (LM 467/LN 542). This allows new answers to move in and occupy the vacant positions that the old answers left behind; and this in turn generates new questions and answers etc. But also the *number* of positions in the human system of the world- and self-interpretation may undergo extension and modification. In this context Christianity has played a key role because it has contributed to an increasing of the number of positions in the system of man's interpretation of the world and himself:

> In our history this system has been decisively determined by Christian theology, and specifically, above all, in the direction of its expansion. Theology created new 'positions' in the framework of the statements about the world and man that are possible and are expected, 'positions' that cannot simply be 'set aside' again or left unoccupied in the interest of theoretical economy (LM 64/ LN 74)

In short, throughout much of Western history, Christianity has functioned as the main conceptual creditor for our philosophical yearnings: Subsidising the massive budget which has been necessary to meet man's insatiable metaphysical needs. It has brought about an extension of the "mortgage of prescribed questions" (LM 65/LN 75) and thus given rise to an expansion of the aspirations and hopes, wishes and expectations of human beings. It is the "inheritance of problems" that constitutes the relative identity in history, i.e. the need to "know again what was once known before" (LM 48/LN 59).

Already in an extensive review of Annelise Maier's colossal five-volume work on late-medieval philosophy (1961), Blumenberg suggests understanding the dynamics of history and the constitution of epochs within these functional

terms. Blumenberg here considers the way epochs can be said to have more than a mere *nominal relevance*, and he offers the following suggestion, which calls to mind Kuhn's notion of paradigms:

> Vielleicht kann man so sagen: die Rede vom Ende einer Epoche und vom Anfang einer neuen bedeutet, dass eine geschichtliche Formation aus der Spannung ihrer eigenen Struktur und unter dem Druck der in der impliziten Systematik ihrer Weltdeutung angelegten Schwierigkeiten und Widersprüche derart die Enge gerät, dass weder Harmonisierungen noch Partielle Reparaturen die aufgestaute Problematik auffangen oder ablenken können, so dass *das Bedürfnis* nach einer neue Gesamtkonzeption immer drängender wird, die aber nicht in der Weise einer absoluten schöpferischen Setzung „neu" sein kann, da sie doch *die Funktion* einer *Antwort* auf die krisenhaft aufgebrochenen *Fragen* haben muss (VdN 83, my italics)

Can Blumenberg's model of reoccupation in any way be qualified as phenomenological? One could say that Husserl's idea of free variation becomes, in Blumenberg's version, an idea about imaginative 'changes of places' or 'changes of positions' (*imaginären Stellentausch oder Stellenweschel*, ZdS 317) in regard to questions. In Husserl's phenomenology the idea about such 'changes of place' is related to the question about intersubjectivity. It relates to our ability to 'take the place of the other', i.e. to imagine ourselves being in the place or situation of the other. It is the name for our ability to understand the other's *real* as our *possible* experience (ZdS 315). The idea of a system of 'positions' that are 'occupied' or 're-occupied' may have as its phenomenological background Husserl's idea of intersubjective changeable 'places', i.e. the ability to convert (*umzuformen*) "den realen Stellenstand und Stellungswechsel in eine imaginäre Modalität" (ZdS 315). On the other hand, it may be that such imaginative variations are not identical with a completely unbound, uncontrolled variation of everything. Blumenberg's history of variation does not equal "the idea of free variation within the horizon of the infinite possibilities that are limited only by the condition of freedom from contradiction" (WM 161/ AM 179). Rather, it is a variation of *certain* questions and answers by means of Husserl's idea of imaginative variation.

Blumenberg undertakes such imaginative variations through his after-metaphysical work of memory. That metaphorology is an 'imaginative-memorial science of possibilities' (Stoellger 2000, 419) thus means: The attempt to rethink what has been in terms of how it could have been. Again, such a work of memory is not identical with a naive revival of what 'really was'. History may well be a "cemetery of promises which have not been kept" (Ricœur 1996, 9). But the task is not to execute an obituary of the dead dimensions of history. Rather, as Ricœur continues, it is a matter of bringing these broken promises back to life "like the dry bones in the valley described in the prophecy of Ezekiel" (Ricœur 1996, 10). In *Temps et récit* Ricœur speaks about the power (*la force*) to 're-activate the unaccomplished potentialities of the past' (Ricœur 1985, 433). My suggestion would be to understand memory as this possibility re-activating power or force.

### 4.6 Taking leave of the Life-world

Can the life-world be a theme for those who live in it (BM 70)? This question may surprise readers who are acquainted with phenomenology. If the question appears peculiar then Blumenberg's answer to it most likely appears even more peculiar: No, because humans do not live in the life-world! In the first part of his "challenging book" (Harries 1987, 519), *Lebenszeit und Weltzeit* (1986), Blumenberg discusses what he refers to as "the misunderstanding of the life world" (LW 7-68). In the traditional sociological discourse, 'life-world' (*Lebenswelt*) has been used to describe the concrete everyday worlds – in the plural form – in which we live. It has been well received in this intellectual milieu, becoming an influential social and cultural category of interpretation. Even though this well received concept is found in Husserl's late work, *Krisis* (1936), its specific use as a cultural-sociological key concept is based on Alfred Schütz's and Thomas Luckmann's reading of the same idea. In *Krisis* Husserl understands lifeworld – which Husserl never uses in the plural form (VS 463) – as the pre-given, intentional background of our "vor- und außerwissenschaftlichen Lebens" and he refers to it as the forgotten "Sinnesfundament der Naturwissenschaft" (Husserl 1936, 48). Following this line of argumentation, Schütz and Luckmann understand life-world as the worlds of our shared experiences characterised by confi-

dence and unquestionedness, bearing 'contours of the self-evident' (*Konturen des Selbstverständlichen*) (Cf. Schütz/Luckmann 1979, 30; 219). Following this line of reflection, theories of the life-world have been identified with different analysis or descriptions of the concrete historical and social-cultural worlds in which human beings live. In this sense the life-world concept has frequently been opposed to the so called abstract systems which, in the language of Jürgen Habermas, tends to colonise the intimate everydayness of our different life-worlds. In Alexandre Koyré's words, modern science has split our world: Cleaving the world in which "we live, love and die" from the "quantitative world of reified geometry", a world in which there is room for everything – except humans (Koyré 1968, 42). The abstract world of science has hereby become alienated from and opposed to the human life-worlds.

According to Blumenberg this widespread understanding of the concept is, however, a misunderstanding. It is a misunderstanding because it overlooks its genuine phenomenological function as a 'limit concept' (*Grenzbegriff*) (LW 63) or as a *terminus a quo* (LC 430). Now, Blumenberg's intention is not to stigmatize the abovementioned 'socio-cultural' use of the life-world concept, declaring it illegitimate. Rather, he wants to bring into consideration what the 'ordinary' use of the concept has thrown a veil over: Namely it's genuine *anthropogenetic function*. According to Blumenberg the life-world concept thus holds a neglected phenomenological-anthropological potential. It is a concept whose function is to conceive a world, which is *no longer* a life-world. Moreover, to say that the abovementioned understanding is a misunderstanding does *not* imply that it has not been a fruitful or rewarding one. It undeniably has. As Blumenberg remarks in another context, so-called 'big impacts' (*großen Wirkungen*) often constitute a 'fruitful misunderstanding' (*fruchtbare Missverständnisse*) (L 23). In his extensive studies of Copernicus, one of the chapters carries the heading: "Consequences of an Instance of Well-Meaning Misguidance" (GkW 290ff; GdK 341ff). More important than the exegetical accuracy is the question of hermeneutical fertility that such (intended or unintended) re-interpretations may give rise to. Even though it should turn out that Blumenberg's claim that the mentioned understanding of life-world is in fact itself the real misunderstanding, it is important

to realize that Blumenberg's concern is not exegetical but related to a subject matter: The possibility of interpreting life-world as a limit concept, i.e. to reconstruct the *immanent-systematic* 'set value' (*Sollwert*) of life-world (LW 17) in Husserl's genetic phenomenology: "Nur in Verbindung mit der Genetisierung der Phänomenologie lässt sich die Einführung der 'Lebenswelt' – weniger ihrem Thema als ihrer Funktion nach – begreifen" (LW 31). In this context Blumenberg's new construction, his attempt to 'think beyond' (Cf. LW 96) Husserl's conception of the life-world is indeed eye-opening.

A short comment is, however, needed here: Blumenberg holds on to the aforementioned 'traditional' cultural-historical understanding of the human *life-worlds* (in the plural) in which we live. This is a slightly confusing state of affairs, which we must untangle. Philipp Stoellger recognises the need for a systematic elaboration of Blumenberg's different life-world understandings (Stoellger 2000, 257ff) and (eventually) – following Blumenberg's own proposal (Cf. LW 65) – suggests distinguishing between *three* different understandings: 1) Life-world (in the singular) as a 'pre-historical', *hypothetical* limit-concept, a *quasi*-transcendental *terminus a quo* for the understanding of 2) the vastly different cultural-historical life-worlds in which we live and die, and finally 3) life-world as a 'post-historical', purely imagined 're-establishment' of (a likewise purely imagined) convergence between expectation and fulfilment (Stoellger 2000, 260f). The point is that both 2) and 3) are secondary to the pre-historical limit-concept with which Blumenberg primarily deals in this context. It is this 'pre-historical', hypothetical limit-concept which must now be subjected to closer examination.

As Kant introduced his concept of *Weltanschauung* in his third critique in 1790 (Cf. Kant 1790, 341), he gave birth to a strikingly paradoxical conceptualisation. How could one possibly have an intuition (*Anschauung*) of that which in principle cannot be an object of intuition (*Welt*)? The answer is that one cannot. It is impossible to provide an intuition for the 'concept' world (Cf. TU 55). Therefore *Weltanschauung* is not, strictly speaking, a concept but an *absolute metaphor*. The conceptual centaur that is 'life-world' (LW 19) is highly ambiguous:

> Wir brauchen eine Theorie der 'Lebenswelt', weil wir nicht mehr in einer solchen leben, aber auch niemals ihr zur Verstandesverfügbarkeit unserer Welt gänzlich entkommen können […] Es wird sich zeigen, dass mit dem Titel ‚Lebenswelt' gerade ein Erlebnisintegral gemeint ist, das ‚von innen' nicht beschreiben werden kann. Die beschreibende ‚Einstellung' hätte immer schon zerstören müssen, was sie vor sich bringen wollte. Es gibt keine ‚Geschichten aus der Lebenswelt'. Mit ihr muss gebrochen sein, um über sie auszusagen […] (LW 23)

The genuine phenomenological 'intention' was not, Blumenberg argues, to describe the concrete worlds in which we actually live. Rather, the *theory* of a life-world is the "answer" to the very *absence* of a life-world. In Blumenberg's own words the life-world is "the counter pole of reality (*Wirklichkeit*) in which phenomenology has become possible" (LC 430). In short: We need a theory of the life-world only because we have stepped out of it. The life-world is thus defined as a *terminus a quo* of human reality which renders the fundamental characteristics of human reality visible. According to Blumenberg the life-world is thus *never* the world in which we live. Rather, it is a hypothetical limit concept which – *ex negativo* – displays some basic features of human reality. It is, in other words, a concept whose *function* is to conceive a world, which is *no longer* a life-world (Cf. Lysemose 2003, 30ff).

Now, by what means is the life-world distinguished from the world in which phenomenology – i.e. description – has become possible? The shortest possible answer seems to be: *By its lack of possibility* (LC 430). In the life-world all given realities defy contingency; that is: *Nothing* could have been otherwise. Blumenberg states: "It is precisely this incapacity to be otherwise which is not even considered in the life-world, since this idea presupposes the idea of the capacity to "also be otherwise" (LC 431). The difficulties connected with a description of the life-world stems from "ihr konstitutiver Mangel an Ausdrücklichkeit, an Prädikativität" (LW 67) – in short: Its lack of contingency. In this 'pre-intentional' world of self-evidence, no questions can be asked, because no questions *need* to be asked; the constitutive relation between questions and answers is made superfluous. Or in the language of phenomenology: The life-world is a world in

which *intentionality* is rendered superfluous because there is no difference or gap between human consciousness and the world. It is a world inaccessible to description because any kind of description presupposes variation and thus the possibility of different intentional perspectives. The life-world is "a sphere of unceasing presence"; it is a world without even the slightest occasion to consider making the absent present (*um Abwesendes anwesend zu machen*) by means of "magic, images, symbols, names, concepts" (LW 34-35). In the life-world all such symbolic forms of representation are constitutively superfluous. The life-world is thus a world that *has never been* a world. It is a place we have *always-already* left behind us but, at the same time, never left *completely*. What the life-world (as a limit concept) makes comprehensible is not that to which the expression refers:

> Denn es geht nicht um die Lebenswelt selbst, sondern um die Möglichkeit eines Lebens, das die genauen Passungen zu einer ihm adäquaten Welt *nicht mehr* hat und mit dieser – unter allen sonst bekannten Bedingungen für Lebewesen tödlichen – Desolation fertig geworden ist und ständig fertig zu werden hat (LW 63)

But if the life-world is indeed only a 'methodological fiction' (Stoellger 2000, 260), a purely imagined 'beginning before the beginning', why is it then relevant in the first place? The short answer to this question seems to be: Because it is nonetheless indispensable to operate with such a limit-concept in order to understand 'the realities (*Wirklichkeiten*) in which we live', i.e. the situation where intentionality has become both possible and necessary. Reality presupposes possibility, i.e. the ability 'to be otherwise' – or in the language of phenomenology 'variation': "Through variation, the phenomena are localised within their horizons of possibility" (LC 434). The life-world, on the other hand, is a world in which negation has no place, where "the negative is without function" (LC 443). What characterises reality (as opposed to the life-world) is described phenomenologically by means of the metaphor 'horizon': The admittance of a leeway of different representations, i.e. contingency (LC 430): "Verlassen der Lebenswelt heißt, in die Kontingenz der Welt einzutreten und ihre Unselbstverständlichkeit

als Antrieb zu ihrer theoretischen Aufarbeitung weniger auferlegt als verhängt zu bekommen" (LW 350-351).

Any description of the *transition* from the life-world into the actual worlds in which we live is only attainable by means of myths and (absolute) metaphors. As we have already seen, it is a constitutive feature of our inner time-consciousness that we cannot contemplate our beginning or our end. Questions about the beginning and the end thus defy scientific and/or 'rational' explanation. This, however, does not mean that questions about the beginning and the end can simply be given up and declared devoid of importance. Such questions maintain significance *even though* they cannot be answered 'theoretically'. Absolute metaphors and myths thus find their *raison d'être* in describing or displaying what cannot be described by means of conceptual or rational procedures. Myths and absolute metaphors (and their numerous receptions) thereby serve as schemes for the *unthinkable*. They function as placeholders for the representation of transitions (*Übergänge*) which cannot be rationally thought and yet somehow *must* be: "Die Situation des Denkens gegenüber dem Mythos koinzidiert hier mit der gegenüber der 'absoluten Metapher': sie genügt seinem Anspruch nicht und muss ihm doch genug sein" (PM 113).

One very influential myth of beginnings reflecting this very point is, of course, the myth of the Garden of Eden. The Garden of Eden is a narrative and mythical representation of a world which cannot be described by objectifying concepts, because it is the very essence of a world where intentionality – understood as dissociation between consciousness and world or, as Blumenberg describes it, between life-time and world-time – has not yet broken out. The myth of the Garden of Eden does not function as a way of *conceiving* the pre-intentional life-world but, by means of this very concept of a life-world, to conceive how a being who *does not* live in a world like that maintains its existence.

What the myth of the Garden of Eden makes comprehensible is *firstly* the different intentional achievements by which man tries to preserve and maintain himself in a world which is *no longer* a life-world. *Secondly*, it offers a narrative portrayal, a "retrospective imagination" (Stoellger 2000, 352) of the transition from this life-world of essential 'self-evidence' and 'unquestionableness' to a

world in which self-preservation has become necessary and unavoidable. The Garden of Eden is an 'absolute metaphor' for that which we only know in so far that we have left it. The rationality of this myth lies in its ability to describe what is, for the human mind, unimaginable and yet indispensable: The beginning. It is an imaginative remembrance of a past which has never been past but, nevertheless, holds important resources for the unfolding of a phenomenological anthropology. Thus, this old and inscrutable story 'visualises' what can only be realised phenomenologically in a retrospective extrapolation; that which lies 'beyond' what is accessible through history (*was noch als Geschichte zugänglich sein kann*) (LW 76-77). Blumenberg's own variations on the biblical creation myth will be considered in the third part of this dissertation. It will become clear how Blumenberg constructs *imaginative variations* of the myth by asking once again: What happened in paradise?' (Cf. M 95). Thus, the myth of paradise becomes the point of departure for Blumenberg's attempt to establish the possibility of an alternative idea of God. I return to this in the last part.

### 4.7 Life-time and World-time: Towards the Relevance of Memory

What is the systematic relevance of memory? In which way can memory be claimed to possess particular significance for Blumenberg's philosophy of religion? The point of departure for Blumenberg's considerations in this regard can be found in the second part of *Lebenszeit und Weltzeit* which carries the heading: "Öffnung der Zeitschere" (LW 69ff). This 'opening of the time gap' is described by means of the two guiding concepts: World-time and life-time.

It has often been noted that *time* constitutes a core problem in Blumenberg's writings (Cf. Russo 1999, 257ff; Hundeck 2000, 309ff). On the one hand, time essentially belongs to me; it is *my* time. On the other hand, I do not have it at my disposal; it fundamentally withdraws itself my control and influence. Time is something profoundly evasive: "Zeit ist das am meisten Unsrige und doch am wenigsten Verfügbare" (*LW* 74). As we have seen, life-world functions as the retrospective imagination of a place which we have always-already left behind us. This imaginary garden of fulfilled wishes is, as a limit concept, a world in which life-time and world-time are indistinguishable. To have stepped out of

the life-world, on the other hand, means that life-time and world-time diverge (LW 99). Blumenberg speaks dramatically about "human lostness in time" (*die Verlorenheit des Menschen in der Zeit*) (LW 183), about the unbearable split between an absolute 'astronomical' world-time and the evanescent brevity of human life-time. Thus, the *difference* between life-time and world-time, i.e. the harsh fact that the world does not begin with our own life no more than it ends with it, constitutes the background for the elementary human experience: "Die Welt kostet Zeit" (LW 73; 196). The price for consciousness *is* the leave-taking with the life-world and that means: The disintegration of life-time and world-time. Moreover, the basic conflict between the world's immeasurable possibilities and the shortness of life-time, the dissociation between the disturbing briefness of human life-time and an overwhelmingly devastating world-time, forms the point of departure for the experience of the *indifference of the world* with regard to the human need for meaning and significance (LW 217).

> Das Bewusstsein, als Episode zwischen Natalität und Mortalität in den Weltlauf eingelassen zu sein – zuerst als der Moment des Individuums, dann auch als der der Gattung -, wäre gewiss nicht jederzeit so formulierbar gewesen; es beginnt mit der schlichten und unselbstverständlichen Wahrnehmung, dass die Welt so wenig mit dem eigenen Leben endet, wie sie mit ihm begonnen hat, und ist jederzeit wieder darin auffindbar, dass keine Generation sich mit dieser Fatalität abzufinden vermag (LW 73)

The basic conflict between the inconceivably immense dimensions of the world-time and the briefness of human life-time can be expressed in the formula: Still less time for still more possibilities and wishes (*Immer weniger Zeit für immer mehr Möglichkeiten und Wünsche*) (LW 73). The fundamental and indissoluble incongruity between a creature of finite life-time and a world of infinite possibilities becomes the point of departure for the painful experience of finiteness. We live in a world, Blumenberg writes, which does not set any 'natural' bounds to the humanly possible except this one: That we have to die (LW 72). What Blumenberg refers to as the most bitter and appalling of all discoveries is the reali-

sation that the world would be the same if we had never been; and, just as unbearable to contemplate, that it will remain the same after we have been (LW 75-76).

In Roman Polanski's film, *Bitter Moon* (1992), one of the characters is invited to clink glasses with people to toast New Year's Eve. "Happy new year!", they all burst out as the character vehemently exclaims, "For those whose case is focussed on eternity the one year is the same as the next". In light of eternity (*sub specie aeternitatis*) – the preferred perspective of philosophy – nothing distinguishes one year from the next. And yet this perspective is *not* the prerogative of a creature whose life-time is episodically brief and persistently exposed to the careless indifference of a seemingly endless world-time. Moreover, Blumenberg observes the implications of the discovery of the inconceivable dimensions of the universe as he underlines how the opening of the gap between world-time and life-time problematises a Christian-eschatological perspective. In the Middle Ages the idea of a *possible* convergence between life-time and world-time still carried an index of plausibility:

> Das Mittelalter hatte ja die Dissoziation von Lebenszeit und Weltzeit gleichsam unter Verschluss gehalten; über der Epoche stand der Vorbehalt ihrer eigenen Unzulässigkeit, ihrer Erfüllung durch Aufhebung der Zeitdimension, wie unwillig diese 'Verheißung' noch ertragen wurde. Prinzipiell konnte die letzte Frist der Welt mit der des eigenen Lebens zusammenfallen, es gab einen eschatologischen Grenzwert der Konvergenz von Lebenszeit und Weltzeit und damit eine zumindest implizit häretische Qualität von 'Langzeitprogrammen' (LW 115)

The possibility of such a convergence has become untenable in the Modern Age. The idea of scientific progress seems to presuppose an idea of large-scale time-consumption (which in itself may be said to 'neutralise' biblical eschatology (Marquard 1973, 16)). The continuation of the world thus forms the underlying premise of the procedural claims of the scientific culture as an on-going, 'endless' work (LW 196). The new *methodological* claims attached to and prepared by

such figures as Descartes and Bacon entail a more comprehensive understanding of 'subject' (UK 135): The quest for truth becomes a potentially infinite and carefully conducted *work* (Cf. PM 37) which cannot be carried out within the narrow limits of the individual's life-time but presupposes an idea of a *generation-long, collective subject*. Only by theoretical 'assimilation' can the individual transcend his 'self-absorption' in the claustrophobic one-man cell of finitude. One of the guiding metaphors of the modern age is 'the unfinished world'; another one the metaphor of '*terra incognita*' (Cf. PM 77ff). The most noticeable 'paradigm' for the divergence between life-time and world-time is, however, found in the discoveries made by modern astronomy. Blumenberg thus sees the dawn of a new era breaking in the extensive need for 'long-range time programs' (*'Langzeitprogramm'*) (LW 117) in regard to modern science, astronomy in particular. This new time requirement of astronomy (*Zeitbedarf der Astronomie*) seems to suggest that spatial metaphors of infinity naturally apply to time as well.

Moreover, the discovery of the staggering cosmological dimensions of the universe seems to strengthen the unbearableness of death and give rise to the painful feeling that *one* life is far from enough (LW 261). Pascal's unforgettable words in his *Pensées* stands as the insignia of this deep cosmological discomfort: "Le silence éternel de ces espaces infinis m'effraie" (Pascal 1670, 615). Here, the atheist's godforsaken cosmic uneasiness is brought, Blumenberg writes, into contact "with the 'natural' function of infinity" (LW 174-175). The petrifying cosmological idea of infinity calls forth a shock of contingency. It doesn't seem to leave much room for the eschatological aspects of Christianity or for the belief that there can be any kind of 'reconciliation' between my contingent existence and the immense temporal proportions of the universe. Moreover, the unfathomable temporal dimensions of the universe reinforce – this is Blumenberg's claim – our sense of defenceless exposure to the ravages of limitless time. In a sense, Blumenberg here contradicts Heidegger's assumption in *Sein und Zeit*, that the 'objective temporal structures' are irrelevant to the constitution of subjective time-experience (Cf. Lübbe 1992, 30). "Heideggers Seinsgeschichte projiziert ins Übergrosse die einfache Feststellung, dass es primär nur immanente

Zeiterfahrung gibt und alle Weltzeitbegriffe nur von jener her verstanden werden kann“ (LW 95).

From where do we know about death? To Heidegger, finitude (*Endlichkeit*) constitutes the very ‘essence’ of ‘consciousness’, its fundamental *a-priori* (LW 92). The hiatus between world-time and life-time is left unnoticed or rather, is declared irrelevant to the determination of the finitude of *Dasein* by Heidegger because both ‘world’ and ‘time’ are considered to be constitutive features of *Dasein* (LW 91-92). The ’originary time’ to Heidegger *is* finite (*Die ursprüngliche Zeit ist endlich*) (Heidegger 1927, 331). The ‘primacy of futurity’, which Heidegger had argued in favour of in § 65 in *Sein und Zeit*, not only uncovers itself in *Dasein’s* fundamental structure as an ecstatic ‘caring for’ (*Sorge*). It also uncovers itself ‘in’ the very structure of *Dasein* as *Sein-zum-Tode* because ‘death’ constitutes the permanent *possibility* upon which we are ‘thrown’. Finitude thus belongs to the very essence of *Dasein* as *Sorge*: “Das Sterben gründet hinsichtlich seiner ontologischen Möglichkeit in der Sorge” (Ibid 252). ‘Death’ should not (at least not primarily) be conceived as our biological ‘collapse’. It is not death as an empirical ‘fact’. Rather, ‘death’ must be conceived (phenomenologically) as death’s unceasing possibility: “Der *Tod ist* als Ende des *Daseins* im Sein dieses Seinden *zu* seinem Sein” (Ibid 259). Our ‘originary future’ (*eigentliche Zukunft*) discloses itself *as finite* (Ibid 329-330). Whereas finitude, according to Heidegger, originates from the immanent structure of *Dasein*, this is not the case by Husserl. To Husserl finitude can be nothing but the indirect, intersubjectively mediated result of an appresentation of the other. Thrown upon itself, consciousness does not possess any idea of its own finitude but is constitutively in need of ‘the other’: ‘Death’ is primarily something that we ‘know’ intersubjectively, through the (death of the) other. This is perhaps the most decisive difference between the founder of phenomenology and “his most important heretic” (LW 91), namely Heidegger. One of Blumenberg’s claims in *Lebenszeit und Weltzeit* could be summarised as a claim about the *non-indifference* of objective time (world-time) for the experience of human finitude (life-time). The experience of time is not timeless.

The unbearableness of death constitutes a recurring theme in Blumenberg's writings. The father of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), identified what he regarded as the three most devastating shocks to the naïve self love of Western man:

> Freud hat von den *Kränkungen* gesprochen, die dem Menschen angetan worden sind: durch Kopernikus, durch Darwin und durch ihn, Freud, selbst (…) Es ist die Frage, ob mit den drei Namen die härteste Bedürftigkeit annähernd erfasst werden konnte, die den Menschen zum trostbedürftigen Wesen macht: der Tod (SF 153)

How does one come to terms with the fact that everything one day will be as if one had never been? How does one cope with the fact that the world "dieselbe wäre, wenn es uns selbst nie gegeben hätte, und alsbald dieselbe sein wird, als ob es uns niemals gegeben hätte" (LW 75-76)? The desolation of death seems undivided. And yet there is a fundamental *ambiguity* about our finitude. Blumenberg hails Heidegger's observation that finitude is what provides life with its meaning: "Significance is related to finitude" (WM 67/AM 77). If we had infinite time at our disposal, one moment would not possess any particular significance in relation to the next. Everything could wait; no moment would be unique. In this way the irrevocability seems to form the unspoken background which makes life valuable and supplies things with meaning. And there lies the paradox: On the one hand, death furnishes my existence with significance and importance; on the other hand, death seems to deprive life of any meaning what so ever.

### 4.8 The Consolation of Memory

One can trace an alternative line of reflection in Blumenberg which points to a *possible* alleviating factor in the counsel of despair which surrounds our finitude: The imprecision and blurred boundaries of death, its indistinct contours. Blumenberg thus seems to voice the idea that the *indefiniteness of death* constitutes the decisive antidote against finitude. The fact that we somehow know that we

one day will be irrevocably forgotten is an almost unbearable thought. The very fact that we do not know exactly when this will occur is the very thing that makes our finitude a little more bearable. Here, the relevance of *memory* shows itself, or to be more precise: Here, the fluid and blurred outlines of memory gain their significance and existential weight. The fact that we cannot know exactly *when* we will be forgotten, by the people we leave behind us, constitutes the acceptable face of death. To be remembered without knowing exactly when the memory of our being will come to an end constitutes the attenuating indefiniteness that makes death a little less relentless. The finality of death is compensated by the merciful indefiniteness of memory:

> Es geht hier nicht, das muss ausdrücklich gesagt werden, ums Unbewusste, sondern ums Unbestimmte. Ums gnädig Unbestimmte, wie man hinzufügen muss, weil darin ein Moment der Erträglichkeit der Indifferenz der Welt gegenüber dem Menschen liegt (…) Ich erinnere mich nicht nur, ich werde auch erinnert; und dies nicht erst im Augenblick, in dem akuter Anlass dazu besteht (…) (LW 305)

Just as the transition from being awake to falling asleep does not take place at any one identifiable point in time, but constitutes an imperceptible and fluid passage of indeterminacy, *forgetting* is not bound to a particular, well-defined moment either. The *merciful uncertainty* of not knowing the exact time when we will be consigned to oblivion may be said to be that which makes death a slightly more tolerable. Blumenberg thus associates death with memory. Moreover, memory finds its (existential) significance in turning my death into something graciously indistinct; it blurs the sharp contours of my death by handing me over to the indeterminacy of the memory of those I leave behind. This does not imply that life-time and world-time converge, but it *does* mean that the 'moment' of my final cessation is left undecided and vague in so far as my self-preservation is handed over to the other's memory. The 'solace' of memory thus lies in its uncertainty, its merciful indeterminacy.

Here an interesting 'anthropological' insight comes to light: Our elementary dependence on 'the memory of the other' (in its *double* genitive form!) may be

seen as a way in which Blumenberg reformulates and transforms some of Husserl's analyses of inner time-consciousness. If self-preservation is an expression of my concern for and caring about my self and my continued existence (*Sorge*), it seems that Blumenberg tries to 'submit' human self-preservation to a kind of *memorial intersubjectivity* (Cf. Hundeck 2000, 330-335). In other words: Memory functions as a *possible* antidote against the uncompromising indifference of world-time. If self-preservation is closely linked to inner time-consciousness, and memory (my memory of other people, other people's memory of me) is a way in which we can obtain a kind of *indeterminate* preservation *beyond* our death, then it may be that memorial intersubjectivity – understood as a kind of "'culture' of retention" ('*Kultur' der Retention*) (LW 303) – functions as a key component in our attempt to extricate ourselves from the absolute character of world-time. In short: Memoria functions as a reserve against the "Unerbittlichkeit des Angewiesenseins von Leben auf Zeit" (H 404).

What does is mean when Blumenberg states that memory constitutes the *intersubjective retention* of life-time (LW 301)? It means that my existence is retained in the memory of my surviving relatives, just as a note in a melody somehow remains present as the melody moves on. The note sinks into the past but there is a period of reverberation, a remaining-present (*retention*) just like my existence somehow subsides in the memory of the people I leave behind. Now, the time that the memory of my existence vanishes cannot be established: It is marked by uncertainty; it is indeterminate. This very indeterminacy becomes, on the other hand, the *subjective protention* of my life-time into intersubjectivity, i.e. my expectation or wish not to be forgotten: "Der Wunsch, die Erwartung des individuellen Subjekts, nicht vergessen zu werden" (LW 301). Seen in this light, it becomes clearer in which way the indeterminacy of memory can be said to be merciful: We know that the faint traces we leave behind us will some day be erased and cease to exist; but we do not know with any kind of accuracy *when* it will happen. And this *is* the resistance of *memoria* against the indifference of the world-time:

> (…) die Funktion der *memoria* (…) besteht in dem Widerstand gegen Kontingenz, gegen den immanent unvollziehbaren Gedanken von Anfang und Ende. Durch die protendierte *memoria* reicht die Lebenszeit in die Weltzeit hinein, verliert sich in dieser ohne das Ärgernis scharfer Bestimmbarkeit ihrer Grenzen (LW 302)

As far as memory thereby becomes a way of 'moderating' the unbearable cleavage between life-time and world-time by blurring the sharp contours of death, one may interpret Blumenberg's conception of time as one which 'privileges' the past rather than the present or the future. The other's memory of me and my memory of the others thereby becomes an index of mutual solidarity. Mutual *solidarity*? Blumenberg is reluctant to speak about the (potentially) *ethical* implications of his thought. Self-preservation is *self*-preservation and as such not considerate towards others: "Das ist charakteristisch für Akte der Selbsterhaltung: Sie können nicht rücksichtsvoll sein" (LW 307). He therefore rather speaks about *mutual self-preservation*: "Der Anspruch an die *memoria* des jeweils anderen ist so etwas wie Selbsterhaltung auf Gegenseitigkeit" (LW 307). Memory constitutes a central component in our self-preservation. It struggles against the indifference of world-time and the loss of individual significance:

> Dieses Phänomen, dass dem Menschen nicht gleichgültig ist, ob die jenseits seiner Lebenszeit fortbestehende Welt Erinnerung an ihn hat oder nicht, ist das stärkste Indiz für seine Gegenwehr gegen die Fremdheit der Weltzeit. Er bäumt sich auf gegen diese Indifferenz, die er selbst in seiner Erinnerung an die eigene vergangene Lebenszeit ständig zu überwinden sucht (…) *Memoria* heißt das Zentrum der Auseinandersetzung zwischen Lebenszeit und Weltzeit (LW 301)

Memory functions as a "revolt against contingency" (LZ 302) in so far that it 'extends' the remembered into a vague anticipation that there could be a future resonance of me after my life-time has come to an end. The indeterminacy of memory thereby constitutes a human shelter, a refuge against an indifferent world of boundless time-resources. The indeterminacy of memory becomes the point of departure for a kind of 'finite immortality' (Cf. Behrenberg 1994, 126) in

which we remain indefinitely – not infinitely – beyond our death. Against the fragile and fragmentary nature of human existence, Blumenberg thus seems to formulate an idea about memorial intersubjectivity which finds its (unattainable) *limit value* in the idea of an *absolute* intersubjectivity:

> [D]ie Vollständigkeit einer *erinnerten* Geschichte wäre dann so etwas wie die reine Intersubjektivität. In der Erinnerung bliebe Intersubjektivität verwahrt, auch wenn sie aus kontingenten Bedingungen – etwa wegen des Eiszeittodes der Welt – aktuell nicht mehr realisiert werden könnte (…) Die Welt wäre nicht überflüssig geworden dadurch, dass sie nicht mehr besteht, wenn sie in der *memoria* der absoluten Subjektivität erhalten bliebe (LW 95-96)

Blumenberg does not have any eschatology[16]. But it is characteristic to his way of working that he nevertheless persistently tries to reach an understanding of the human interests, expectations and traces of significance that have been attached to and articulated in such eschatological models. Again, to declare that such a strategy only possess a 'historical' interest would be to miss the point. As "images of hope against death" (*Hoffnungsbilder gegen den Tod*) (Bloch 1959, 1279), to use Ernst Bloch's beautiful expression, models of eschatology and immortality cannot simply be declared to be 'erroneous illusion'. Arguably, such models may still hold in-exhausted resources, vestiges of significance for the contemporary attempt to reach an understanding of what it means to be a being whose death also seems to be the death of all hopes and possibilities. Are we really more reconciled with death than our human ancestors? Perhaps the "oppressiveness of contingency" (*die Bedrängnis der Kontingenz*) (WM 293/AM 325), which has been invested in such eschatological models and images of immortality, does not cease just because any attempt to produce 'proofs' of their reliability or truth has been rendered silent in our scientific age.

Blumenberg's *methodological agnostisticism* finds a striking expression in an attempt to attend to all that which we do not know any longer, if we know, what

[16] It should be remarked, though, that there allegedly is material for the working out of a *philosophical* eschatology among Blumenberg's *Nachlass* in the archives of Marbach.

might mean. His strategy can be translated into a question: What does such an idea or the stock of such conceptions mean and what may they still mean "to the extent that they find people who are convinced by them, or even merely find agnostics who want to know the meaning of something that they do not believe they can know (*die wissen wollen, was das bedeutet, was sie nicht wissen zu können glauben*) (WM 294/AM 325)? In other words: That the belief in immortality – the "old crown jewel of metaphysics" (WM 432/AM 469) – has become a homeless thought which in our time appears as "sheer dogma" or "fanciful redundancy" (LM 467/LN 542) probably doesn't admit much doubt. But that does not at once imply that the expectations, wishes and hopes which have found expression in such 'images of hope' can be declared obsolete. Here we catch a glimpse of what has been described as Blumenberg's *memorial ethos*: Not all those concept and ideas which may *seem* outmoded, at least to many in our own scientific age, should be consigned to oblivion. That which we think we have decisively left behind us must be remembered, since that too may teach us something about 'the human': Teach us about what humans have regarded, and continue to regard, as essential. What is the question to which such human models of immortality form the unspoken answer? Blumenberg's answer seems to be: The intolerable discrepancy between world-time and life-time. As we have seen, the wide "divergence between world-time and life-time" (LW 73) represents the most painful fact which humans must come to terms with. If this is kept in mind, eschatology and immortality may be understood as models of resistance against the inexorable process of erosion (Cf. WM 241/AM 268) which is the price for having left the life-world. Moreover, such models find their unspoken motivational background in

> (…) die Aufhebung des Ärgernisses, welches der einzelne daran nimmt, dass die Welt über die Grenzen seiner Lebenszeit hinweg unberührt fortbesteht (…) Überlebt zu werden, überlebt zu sein, gehört als metaphorische Beschreibung einer Ängstlichkeit derer (…) zu den akuten Erfahrungen beschleunigter Geschichtsabläufe (…) Nicht überlebt werden zu können, ist der Trost, der an der Mitteilung hängt, man würde zwar – wie ohnehin durch den Tod – verlie-

> ren müssen, was man an der Welt und in der Welt hat – aber in und mit dem Verlust aller (LW 78)

Does that mean that models of eschatology and immortality are motivated by the individual's hope and demand "über seine Lebenszeit hinaus, nicht vergessen zu werden" (LW 302)? Do they form the unstated response to the radical contingency and brevity of human life-time? To Nietzsche, the belief in personal immortality (*der Personal-Unsterblichkeit*) is nothing but a big lie, "das bösartigste Attentat auf die *vornehme* Menschlichkeit" (Nietzsche 1895, 1205). And yet Nietzsche acknowledges the right to make untrue claims whenever we lack truth: "Where one cannot know anything true, one is permitted to lie", Nietzsche writes in a note from his *Nachlass* (Cf. WM 242/AM 269). Despite the crude character of this formulation, it has been suggested by Blumenberg that it "merely describes as 'permitted' what occurs in any case when people are embarrassed for lack of truth or of truths – even in cases of proclaimed resignation: Vacancies are always filled" (WM 242/AM 269). It could seem, therefore, that even though contemporary Christianity "scarcely mentions immortality in its rhetoric any longer" and thus "unintentionally has abandoned a principal element of its historical identity" (LM 467/LN 542) we nonetheless are confronted with our "inability to shake off inherited questions" (*Unaufwerfbarkeit der Fragen*) (LM 48/LN 59) – including questions about 'immortality'. The 'unanswerable' questions of metaphysics cannot easily be left unanswered *even though* we may sometimes dismiss them as obsolete. Such considerations are typical of Blumenberg. They reveal how the *historical* and the *systematical* dimensions of his thinking are intimately entangled and marked by a peculiar 'undecided' character.

Nevertheless, it seems clear that Blumenberg does not have any confidence in an 'absolute future' involving the destruction of all things known. Such an (eschatological) idea of a *post-historical life-world* (Cf. LW 65) has not only lost its persuasiveness but is also highly problematic on the grounds that it involves an *absolutation of the future*: Such an attempt to force the world-time to converge with one's own life-time constitutes a disquieting example of "absolute narcissism" (LW 80). Blumenberg refers to Hitler's so-called 'Bormann-Diktate' (Mar-

tin Bormann was Hitler's private secretary) as the 'last of his enormities': Not wanting to die unless he could take the whole world to his grave. Seen in this light, Hitler's own life is a piece of 'secular eschatology': The desperate attempt to force life-time and world-time to synchronise. To complete *everything* within the shortness of one life-time (*alles innerhalb eines einzigen kurzen Menschenlebens zu vollenden*) (LW 83), as Hitler wrote in his political testament, was the insane background against which Hitler's self-absorbed insanity was played out. Because Hitler wanted to let the world's existence depend on his own life-time, he had only resentment for those who would survive him (LW 83):

> Eine äußerste Gewalttat, mehr noch: Gewalttätigkeit gegen die Grundbedingung menschlichen Daseins in ihrem Grenzwert vorzustellen, heißt, die Zurückzwingung der Weltzeit auf die Dimension der Lebenszeit zu vergegenwärtigen (LW 84)

Blumenberg's memorial thinking is also an attempt to distance itself from this kind of absolutistic madness. Here, a critique of a certain conception of time seems to resound. The idea of an "eschatological state of emergency" (*eschatologischen Ausnahmezustandes*) (LM 45/LN 55), whose energy demolishes any 'intra-worldly' interest or concern, can also be interpreted as a Gnostic pattern of thought: The *present* world is denied any positive qualities in favour of the absolute *future* of redemption. This kind of radical dualism between past and future, between 'experience' and 'expectation', tends to sacrifice *this* world for that of a *coming* one. The future alone is of importance. Blumenberg seems to turn away from such a Gnostic way of thinking by subscribing to an 'anti-Gnostic', 'de-eschatological' conception of time which points towards the *past* and its enormous reserves of meaning. Might this be in order to absolutise the past?

In the third part of *Lebenswelt und Weltzeit* (which discusses Husserl's idea of 'primal institution' (*Urstiftung*)), Blumenberg makes an enigmatic observation, drawing on Nietzsche, as he ponders the consequences of the second law of

thermodynamics (stating that entropy will constantly increase and thus eventually make everything in vain):

> Unter dem Namen 'Urstiftung' belegt sich der Anspruch auf Unvergeblichkeit der menschlichen Geschichte in einem Augenblick, da man sich damit abzufinden gelernt hat, dass der Mensch zwischen Evolution und 'Wärmetod' nur ein Weltepisode ist (…) Wenn es keine absolute Zukunft mehr geben kann, muss es eine absolute Vergangenheit geben, das untilgbare Gewesensein (…) Was gewesen ist, bleibt (LW 360)

Whatever has been stays. This is a powerful if rather abstruse claim. It seems to be the claim that lies behind Blumenberg's idea about the 'death of God' to which we shall turn in part III. Blumenberg here seems to touch on a curious facet of the human condition, which Vladimir Jankélévitch has presented in the following formulation (and which Ricoeur cites on the very first page of *La Mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli*): "Celui qui a été ne peut désormais ne pas avoir été: désormais ce fait mystérieux et profondément obscur d'avoir vécu est son viatique pour l'éternité" (Jankélévitch 1974, 339; Cf. Ricoeur 2000, 602/631[17]). Is this a kind of memorial eternity? I shall argue that in *The Death of the Cross*, Blumenberg catches sight of the theoretical background for the formulation of a kind of *backward-turned eternity*. Moreover, Blumenberg seems to interpret the *death* of God as the point at which God finally reaches his *unchangeability*; since also God, as one who *has been*, cannot *not* have been. For the world not to have been in vain there has to be some kind of 'continuance' (*Fortbestand*) of that which has been. In the difficult words of Blumenberg: "Es kann niemals wieder so werden, wie es gewesen war (…) Gegengift gegen Kontingenz: was ist, kann nicht

[17] Two peculiarities need attention here: For some reason Ricoeur's references to Jankélévitch are not in concordance with mine *even though* Ricoeur apparently uses the same version as I do (Flammarion, Paris: 1974). It seems, therefore, that there must be two different editions of this book. Furthermore, the English translation of *La mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli* has simply *left out* a sentence from the French original (namely the words: "L'auteur [i.e. Jankélévitch, UHR] oppose fortement l'irrévocable à l'irréversible (chap. 4)" (Ricoeur 2000, 631). This sentence is failing in the English translation.

gleichgültig sein, weil es gewesen sein wird“ (LW 96). I return to a discussion of this in part III.

**Some Conclusions**

We are now in a position to summarise some of the main points to emerge from the first part of this study:

a) Blumenberg's metaphorology is less a *theory of* than a *work on* metaphors. Blumenberg's idea of absolute metaphors may be seen as a (Kantian inspired) claim about the existence of theoretically unanswerable, but pragmatic-orientationally unavoidable 'answers' to metaphysical questions of totality. Metaphysics was defined as a question about (certain) questions. Moreover, I argued that Blumenberg's metaphorology may be seen as a 'prolongation' of Kant's turn to anthropology which thematises Kant's philosophy according to the world concept in a *backward-turned, memorial horizon*. It does so by transposing Kant's question into the pluperfect, thereby pursuing the pre-reflective expectations and wishes that guide our world- and self-understanding. The problem about the relation between metaphorology and metaphysics was addressed and metaphorology was characterised as an *after-metaphysical work of memory*.

b) In order to qualify this characterisation we turned our attention to Blumenberg's *phenomenology of history*. Blumenberg's model of reception ('reoccupation') was taken into consideration and I argued that what characterises Blumenberg's phenomenology of history can be summarised in to overall claims: i) History is metaphor because it is the continuous 'carrying-over' (*metaphora*) of questions and problems, interests, hopes and expectations which constitute the *implicit* background of pre-reflective needs of anything 'new' in history; ii) history is, as a consequence, describable as the *retention* of questions and expectations that remain through time. Even though Blumenberg's model of reception generally focuses on the *continuity* of history and thus turns down any idea of absolute discontinuous rup-

# Part II

# Leave-taking with God

The aim of the first part of this study was to establish a theoretical point of departure for what follows in the next two sections. My intention was to articulate a particular idea of memory based on Blumenberg's *metaphorology* and his *phenomenology of history*.

In the passages which follow I will turn to the question of God, a question Blumenberg addresses within a metaphorological horizon of reflection. This basically means that Kant's third question according to the world-concept – "for what may we hope?" (Kant 1787, 677 (B 833)) – forms the unspoken background of Blumenberg's metaphorological re-opening of the question of God. One could, therefore, capture Blumenberg's guiding metaphorological intention within the following question: *Which God did we think we could hope for?* This question gestures towards the more or less unspoken background of Blumenberg's metaphorological re-opening of the question of God. Again, this question's pluperfect form brings to light a peculiarly ambiguous relation to the question of God in Blumenberg's writings: On the one hand God is treated 'indirectly', in a detached perspective; on the other hand, Blumenberg's way of approaching the question of God opens up imaginative variations on this old problem, thereby allowing alternative possibilities to come to life. The intention now is to give an account of Blumenberg's 'leave-taking with God'.[18] A striking passage from *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age* may serve as the platform from on which I construct this account:

> The Modern Age began, not indeed as the epoch of the death of God, but as the epoch of the hidden God, the *deus absconditus* – and a hid-

[18] I have chosen this variation on the more usual English expression 'taking leave of', because 'taking leave *with*' is intended to introduce an element of ambiguity: On the one hand we are leaving God; on the other hand God is still with us. Furthermore, it is a point in Blumenberg that this leave-taking with God is not simply human's dismissal of God, but also God's taking leave with himself.

> den God is *pragmatically* as good as a dead. The nominalist theology induces a human relation to the world whose implicit content could have been formulated in the postulate that man had to behave as though God were dead. This induces a restless taking stock of the world, which can be designated as the motive power of the age of science (LM 346/LN 404)

In this passage, Blumenberg explicitly brings 'the death God' in relation to a specific way of thinking about God, i.e. a certain theological conceptualisation of God in the late medieval period. 'The death of God' – traditionally associated with authors such as Hegel and Nietzsche – is thus conjoined with nominalistic *Dieu-caché* theology of the late medieval period. But how are we to understand that? Blumenberg's answer is to be found in an account of the genesis of modernity, and it is to this account we now turn.

**1. Modernity Re-interpreted**

A large part of Western thought on religion in modern times has been captured under the heading of *secularisation*. Secularisation theses, in vastly different forms, thus seem to constitute *the* main theoretical framework usually used to explain the relation between modernity and religion. Blumenberg is best known for his extensive studies of the genesis of modernity, the results of which are laid out, primarily, in *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age* where he offers an alternative historical account of the philosophical and theological constituents of the Modern Age.

The critical reception of *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age* has been shaped, in no small part, by the extent to which readers have been persuaded by one central thesis: That the genesis of modernity can be understood as a legitimate overcoming of Gnostic elements in late-medieval theology. As Anselm Haverkamp has argued, the immediate success of the book seemed to consist in its provocative 'repainting' of the history of theology, a project which caused quite a number of renowned philosophers to enter the discussion. The reception of the work has, however, *grosso modo* been marked by a failure to take the *metaphorological structure* into consideration (Haverkamp 2001, 437). In other words: *The legiti-*

*macy of the Modern Age* has not been conceived within the metaphorological framework of reflection presented by Blumenberg six years before in his *Paradigmen*.

What makes a discussion of his theory on modernity relevant for the present dissertation can be summed up in the following three points: a) the intimate relation between theology and the rise of modernity is discussed by Blumenberg in a way that places the question of 'the death of God' in a new light; b) this reinterpretation of the genesis of the Modern Age can be seen as a *metaphorological* way of re-negotiating the conceptual and metaphorical means by which we understand our historical past and, as a consequence, our contemporary conditions; c) these conditions (which make up our historical past) form the background to Blumenberg's own variations introduced in *Matthäuspassion*.

In order to do justice to the (often neglected) metaphorological dimensions of Blumenberg's studies of modernity, I will first give a give a brief outline of his guiding ideas in *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*.

### 1.1 Secularisation as Metaphor

What does is mean to say that 'secularisation' is a metaphor? (Cf. Sommer 1989) It means that it is a 'category of interpretation' (LM 22/LN 29; Cf. Ruh 1980) which represents an answer to the question: Who are we? Moreover, the secularisation thesis forms a highly influential model of interpretation with regard to the question about the constitutive connections between the Christian Middle Ages and the Modern Age. Secularisation has become, it seems, a key category of interpretation that functions as a formula of continuity between the Modern Age and its historical past. Originally, the term *secularisatio* was used to signify the *transfer* of property and goods belonging to the Church onto 'secular' hands. Hence, it functioned as a church-juridical *terminus technicus* which is often related to the Peace of Westphalia in 1648 even though the concept itself is younger (Cf. Zabel 1984, 794). Once this originally narrow legal meaning was *transferred* (*meta-fora*) to a broader cultural and symbolic level, 'secularisation' became a historical category of interpretation. As such, it signifies – in the words of Weizsäcker – that "the modern world can largely be understood as the result

of a secularisation of Christianity" (LM 25/LN 33). Secularisation thus becomes the answer to the question: From where does the actual given originate? Secularisation suddenly gives voice to a particular *interpretation* of our historical past (Sommer 1989, 28) saying that originally Christian theological concepts and ideas have in fact only been translated into 'secular' thoughts and ideas and only been given new names. Thus, secularisation is a metaphor; it is a metaphor because it *transfers* the idea of transference of goods from one field to another on the understanding of history itself. It is this transferred, metaphorical sense against which Blumenberg in order to illuminate the unspoken assumptions, i.e. the "background metaphorics" (*Hintergrundsmetaphorik*) or "implicative metaphorics" (*implikativer Metaphorik*) (LM 23/LN 31; Cf. PM 20; 189) that are operative 'behind' this concept.

In this regard, Blumenberg focuses his attention on the background metaphorics of the legal process which functions as a guide – *als Leitfaden* – for the secularisation theory, and points to the "identifiability of the expropriated property, the legitimacy of its initial ownership" (LM 23-24/LN 32) and that means: The secularisation category "makes conscious (…) an "objective cultural debt"" (LM 25/ LN 33). The title of Blumenberg's work must be seen exactly on this background: It is an attempt to describe the Modern Age as an era which exists in its own right, i.e. to describe it as a *legitimate* overcoming of the theological threats which according to Blumenberg characterises the late-medieval period.

### 1.2 Taking Leave of the Secularisation Theory

Blumenberg's engaged critique of secularisation theory seems to revolve around two focal points: 1) The different forms of secularisation theories are – whether tacitly or pronounced – marked by a tendency to throw suspicion on the Modern Age thereby (at least implicitly) making it the illegitimate misappropriation of its historical precursor; 2) secularisation theories depend on *substantial* premises since they claim that there is a "univocal relation between whence and whiter, an evolution, a change in the attributes of substance (*Substanzwandel*)" (LM 4/LN 12). In short: To speak about secularisation is partly to use a 'category of historical wrong' (*eine Kategorie des geschitchlichen Unrechts*), partly to make

assumptions about an underlying, substantial heritage which has been disguised or unmasked (Cf. LM 9/LN 17). The dominant metaphoric operative in the secularisation discourse is therefore not only one of (illegitimate) misappropriation, but also one of surfaces and depths (Cf. Lazier 2003, 628).

It should be noted that Blumenberg distinguishes between two different uses of the secularisation category: A descriptive-sociological and a historical-explanatory (LM 16/LN 23; Cf. Ruh 1980, 68f). While the first use of the term signifies something like the (alleged?) "disappearance of religious ties, attitudes to transcendence, expectations of an afterlife, ritual performances" (LM 3/LN 11) which has been the focus of considerable controversy within studies of religion, the only target of Blumenberg's criticism is the historical-explanatory use of the term, because it presupposes "the alienation of a historical substance from its origin" (LM 19/LN 26) and thus orientates itself by means of a metaphorical model of in-authenticity (*Uneigentlichkeit*) (LM 18/LN 25). Hence, Blumenberg's critique of the secularisation thesis is not motivated by a general discontent in regard to its explanatory power as an inadequate quantitative-descriptive *sociological* term – even though it may also in this regard turn out to be misguiding (Peter L. Berger, one of the leading supporters of secularisation theory in the 1960's, completely abandoned his earlier claims, concluding that "a hole body of literature by historians and social scientists loosely labelled 'secularization theory' is essentially mistaken" (Berger 1996/1997, 2)). Blumenberg's concern is not the sociological question about, roughly speaking, a description of the (possible) increase or decrease of 'religious activity' in modern societies (although in "this descriptive sense one can cite almost anything as a consequence of secularisation", as Blumenberg critically remarks (LM 4/LN 11)), but its explanatory power as a process category relating to the history of ideas.

In his book *Meaning in History* (1949), Karl Löwith argues that the "modern world is as Christian as it is un-Christian because it is the outcome of an age-long process of secularization" (Löwith 1949, 201). Moreover, he claims that "our modern world is worldly and irreligious and yet dependent on the Christian creed from which it is emancipated (…)" (Ibid 201) and explains that even "radical atheism" is only possible "within a Christian tradition", because the

"feeling that the world is thoroughly godless and godforsaken presupposes the belief in a transcendent Creator-God who cares for his creatures" (Ibid 201). The Modern Age is a child born out of wedlock; it is the problematic, if not fatal, result of antique cosmology (or, as Löwith writes, the "natural theology of antiquity" (Ibid 192)) and Jewish-Christian eschatology. The Hebrew and Christian faith has "perverted the classic meaning of *historein* and, at the same time, invalidated the classical view of the future as something which can be investigated and known like a fact" (Ibid 17). Löwith's conclusion is that "the moderns elaborate a philosophy of history by secularizing theological principles" (Ibid 19). As such the secularisation of theological principles means that modernity is in consequence a 'bastard': "We are neither Ancient Ancients nor Ancient Christians, but moderns – that is, a more or less inconsistent compound of both traditions" (Ibid 19).

Löwith's overall intention is to show that the modern philosophies of history (e.g. Hegel, Marx, Comte) – i.e. the thought that history is a "single, unified future-directed history of progress" (Wallace 1983, xv) – are in fact 'merely' secularisations of the eschatological pattern set up in Judaism and Christianity. The secularisation of these Jewish-Christian elements are, however, comparatively unimportant compared with the "unique epochal break" (*den einzigen Epochenbruch*) which signals the starting point for what Löwith judges a "fateful disjunction of nature and history" namely: "the turn away from the pagan cosmos of antiquity with a cyclical structure of security" to the "one-time action of the biblical-Christian type" (LM 28/LN36).

It is statements like these that harbour Blumenberg's suspicion that Löwith's secularisation thesis implies, despite its apparent approval of the process of secularisation, a fundamental illegitimacy:

> When[19] Karl Löwith legitimizes secularisation, insofar as for him it is still an intra-Christian and postpagan phenomenon – legitimate, that is, only with in the overall illegitimacy (*Gesamtillegitimität*) of the turning away from the cosmos in favour of history – then he must already have 'secularized' the system of the nonderiveable originality of the whole system that has fallen away from the cosmos (LM 29/ LN 38)

Löwith's basic claim is that a (modern) philosophy of history cannot be autonomous because it is derived from something else that it is not: It has its masked background in the Jewish-Christian tradition that in that way functions as the indispensable precondition for its different modern articulations. In sum: Because the Jewish-Christian eschatology was (according to Löwith) a fatal break with its Ancient, cyclical model of history, the different, modern secularisations of this eschatological model are also ultimately illegitimate. Moreover, Blumenberg sees in Löwith's considerations a reflection of the secularisation theorem that precisely voices that kind of historical substantialism, which Blumenberg turns himself against. Löwith's historical model of understanding thus depends on "the establishment of constants in history" and eventually on "substantialistic premises" (LM 29/LN 37).

Blumenberg's critique of the secularisation theorem has, of course, itself been subject to severe criticism. In his entry on 'Säkularisierung' in *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*, Ulrich Barth concludes that Blumenberg's critique of the secularisation theorem suffers from "einige schwerwiegende Plausibilitätsdefizite", that Blumenberg's "pauschale Verdächtigung des theologischen Gebrauchs des Säkularisierungsmodell" is mistaken and, finally, that Blumenberg's criticism of Löwith assumes almost absurd features when he – Blumenberg, that is – subsumes Löwith under a theological application of the secularisation model, since Löwith's main intention was in fact the radical "Enttheologisierung der

[19] For some reason, Robert Wallace has translated the German 'Wenn' with the hypothetical 'if' and not, as I think it must be, with 'when'. It is not, according to Blumenberg, a question *if* Löwith legitimises secularisation, but rather *that* his legitimisation must presuppose an overall illegitimisation.

Geschichtsphilosophie" (Barth 1998, 608-609). Even though this is not the place to go into an in-depth discussion of the Löwith-Blumenberg controversy, a short comment must be made: It seems to me that Barth overlooks Blumenberg's *metaphorological* intention and thus too hastily rejects the importance of Blumenberg's critique: Secularisation is a debatable metaphor for the articulation of (a certain) historical self-interpretation. Blumenberg's point is that our historical self-understanding is conceptually and (not least) metaphorically mediated and *as such* is not simply a matter of course, not simply a given. Moreover, the underlying problem that is taken up for re-consideration in Blumenberg's critique of the secularisation theorem is in fact: Which past did we think we could have? His functional re-occupation thesis is a way of making less obvious what the secularisation theorem takes for granted – namely that 'Modernity' has somehow violated a genuinely Christian copyright in regard to certain matters and affairs.

My intention with these sparse comments was simply to prepare the way for Blumenberg's alternative account of the genesis of the Modern Age. Blumenberg's intention is namely *not* to contest that the Modern Age is thoroughly *related* to its Christian background. Rather, he defines his position as follows:

> There are entirely harmless formulations of the secularisation theorem, of a type that can hardly be contradicted. One of these plausible turns of phrase is "unthinkable without". The chief thesis then, roughly put, would be that the Modern Age is unthinkable without Christianity. That is so fundamentally correct, that the second part of the book is aimed at demonstrating this fact – with the difference, however, that the thesis gains a definable meaning only through a critique of the foreground appearance – or better: the apparent background presence – of secularisation (LM 30/LN 39)

Also to Blumenberg the Modern Age would be 'unthinkable without Christianity'. Only: This statement is – taking by itself – trivial if not completely hollow. Blumenberg thus needs to elaborate a more precise formulation of this truth. His alternative conception of the genesis of the Modern Age is found in the second part of *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, and it is to this work that we now turn.

Even though there are different levels of argumentation in Blumenberg's multi-faceted attempt to rethink the constituents of the Modern Age, I will concentrate my attention on the theologically relevant dimensions of his re-description of modernity; in particular, I shall examine the implications for the 'death of God' hypothesis.

**2. Blumenberg's Alternative Understanding of the Genesis of the Modern Age**

Were one to formulate a highly condensed version of Blumenberg's theory on modernity, one would look no further than his own words: The Modern Age began as an act of theodicy (Cf. GkW 262/GdK 307). Now, even though this simplistic formulation encourages misunderstandings it nonetheless voices an important idea guiding Blumenberg's re-thinking of modernity: The (unresolved) problem of evil constitutes (according to Blumenberg) a corner stone in the genesis of modernity.

Moreover, Blumenberg's critical attack on the secularisation theorem calls for an alternative description of the origin and constitutive characteristics of the Modern Age. Blumenberg's formulation of this alternative understanding generally takes place by means of two guiding concepts: *Theological Absolutism and Human Self-Assertion* (both introduced in part II of LM). On a structural level the relation between the Middle Ages and the modern era is not, Blumenberg argues, characterised by an underlying, substantial tradition that is simply being 'secularised' in the modern era. The relation should rather be understood like this: Human Self-Assertion is the historical 'reply' to a specific situation of problems in the late Middle Ages (described by Blumenberg as theological absolutism). The already mentioned 'question-answer model' should be kept in mind here: The modern era represents an answer to the questions raised within a particular theological field of reflection in the late medieval period. The two core concepts used by Blumenberg in order to portray the genesis of the distinctive profile of the Modern Age thus relate to each other like a question to its answer. And the relationship between the two concepts can be depicted by means of the aforementioned replication model: Human Self-assertion forms the historical reply to the theological absolutism of the late medieval period.

It is this, on the face of it, rather abstract model of explanation which constitutes the conceptual framework of Blumenberg's detailed analysis of the historical process that led to a theological collapse in the late medieval period. The *historical* model of understanding suggested here, seems to be in agreement with what Marquard has pointed out as the second motive in Blumenberg's philosophical anthropology: The need for distance. Hence, human self-assertion is motivated by a need to create distance from the theological absolutism of the late Middle Ages. But what formed the background, what encouraged this new, theologically tense climate? Blumenberg's contentious answer can be found in an assertion which, to some, will seem eccentric: The Modern Age is "the second overcoming of Gnosticism" (LM 126/LN 138). How are we to understand that?

**2.1 Theodicy and Evil**

The point of departure for Blumenberg's rethinking of the relation between the Middle Ages and the Modern Age is displaced to the question of evil. While this issue had played a secondary, systematically subordinated role in antiquity, it became a more urgent problem during the Christian centuries. Christianity's idea of an omnipotent God, who is the creative source of all being, radicalises the question about the origin and nature of evil in an unprecedented way. In antiquity, evil was generally interpreted as a manifestation of deficiency. Of course, the Greeks knew all about the painful and sorrowful dimensions of life. But evil was not an independent or autonomous dimension of reality, but rather a faceless residue, a manifestation of the necessary discrepancy between the 'ideas' and the 'phenomena': "There remains a residue of undefined incongruity, and on this rests the entire burden of the explanation of the fact that in this world there is *also* evil" (LM 128/LN140). Cosmos is not the result of a genuine creational act, but simply a *modelling* of the eternally pre-given matter. In Plato's dialogue *Timaios* it is thus characteristic that the Demiurge is not omnipotent but simply joins together the already pre-given matter with the eternal forms: "Die Formen des Negativen sind Defekte des Seins, ihm selbst nicht zugehörig. Das

schlechthin Böse, gäbe es überhaupt ein solches, bestünde in der Abwesenheit jedweden Seins" (Geyer 1990, 13). Hence, the Demiurge only carries out and completes what according to the eternal ideas necessarily *must* be carried out; all possibilities are already there (NdN 21) and the Demiurg's mission is to 'make the best of it' (Marquard 1990, 93). Formation is not creation; and since Cosmos is not created out of nothing but constitutes an eternal, organic totality 'impregnated' with the "splendour of necessity" (*der Glanz des Sollens* (H 143)), neither a theodicy nor a cosmodicy is needed (LM 127/LN139). Peter Sloterdijk has shown how antique thinking is guided by an exceptional reliance in the perfection of the sphere (*sphaira*) that hereby functions as a symbol of totality (*Totalitätssymbol*) which is the source of unceasing wonder and fascination: "Die Kugel will ebenso betrachtet und verehrt wie berechnet und vollzogen werden" (Sloterdijk 1999, 16). The necessity and perfection of the sphere becomes the emblem itself of the Demiurg's formation of the world. Nonetheless, there seems to be an antinomy in the early history of European thought: The Greek not only 'invented' cosmos (and theory understood as a 'passive' contemplation of the heavens). They also invented tragedy; but tragedy is in fact "an expression that the gods are not responsible for the cosmos, have not devised or created it" (GkW 8/GdK 16).

The elementary Ancient 'cosmos reliance' prevents the issue of evil from becoming a distinctive problem with which to wrestle; it holds an unquestioned, 'natural' place in the world. In the Platonic tradition, however, this reliance is called into question. In the different systems of Neo-Platonism the *distance* between matter and ideas is increased: "to the *theologizing* of the Idea corresponds the *demonizing* of matter" (LM 128/LN 140). This shift finds its result in the light metaphorics. In his early text, 'Light as a Metaphor for Truth: At the Preliminary Stage of Philosophical Concept Formation' (*Licht als Metapher der Wahrheit. Im Vorfeld der philosophichen Begriffsbildung*), Blumenberg makes the observation that besides concepts in the strict sense, which are generally offset (*aufgewogen*) by definition and fulfilled intuition (*Anschauung*) "(…) there is a broad range of mythical transformations, bordering on metaphysical conjectures, which find expression in a metaphorics with diverse forms". This preliminary stage (*Vor-*

*feld*) of concepts is, "in its "aggregate stage", more plastic, more sensitive to the ineffable, and less dominated by fixed traditional forms. Often, what could not find a medium of expression in the rigid architectonics of systems found expression here" (LaM 139). As mediums of articulation (*Arikulationsmittel*) of what 'truth', 'reality', 'appearance', 'meaning' etc. are, metaphors of light are incomparable. In Plato the phenomena are not simply the opposite of the ideas, but marked by a fundamental ambiguity which is reflected in the German word 'Schein': The phenomena are not 'appearance' (*Schein*) in a purely negative and illusory sense. They also 'reflect' or 'mirror' (*Schein*) the ideas, and thus carry traces of the eternal ideas. The visible world is the phenomenal reflection, and not the mere negation of the eternally true world of ideas; the phenomena are *versimililar* ('wahr-scheinlich') because they reflect the eternal light of the ideas (Cf. PM 117ff; LaM 146; 169-170). This fundamental ambiguity is, however, abandoned in Neo-Platonism where "the world appears as the great failure to equal its ideal model" (LM 128/LN 140). The difficulties of maintaining the Ancient concept of cosmos becomes particularly evident with Gnosticism which "bears a more radical metaphysical stamp" (LM 128/LN 140).

**2.2 Gnosticism**

Gnosticism serves as an important interpretive key in Blumenberg's writings. As already mentioned, the guiding assumption behind Blumenberg's modernity thesis is that the Modern Age is the second overcoming of the Gnosticism which re-appeared under "'aggravated circumstances'" (*verschärften Bedingungen*) in the late Middle Ages. Such a pronouncement may very well grate with most historians who are familiar with Gnosticism. Is not Gnosticism a closed chapter, referring to various religious systems and movements in antiquity and the early Christian tradition (primarily the 2nd and 3rd Century A.D.) and thus something long dead in the late Middle Ages? Even though Gnosticism as a *religio-historical* phenomenon undeniably is related to a (more or less clearly delimited) period of time, it also holds a status as an *interpretive category* of contemporary philosophical thought. As an interpretive lens of philosophy Gnosticism doesn't take aim at the historical-concrete appearances; it is used as a *functional* category of interpre-

tation which has structural similarities. It is this latter sense to which Blumenberg attaches his understanding of gnosis or Gnosticism. Thus, Blumenberg is not concerned with the wide range of speculative variants and historical manifestations that might be subsumed under this term. Gnosis does not signify, at least not for philosophers, "ein für allemal fertiger Bestand an mythischen Figuren, religiösen Dogmen oder philosophischen Lehren" but rather is "eine in sich variantenreiche und umbildungsfähige Formation" (Sommer 1987, 50):

> Es gibt *die* Gnosis so wenig wie *den* Mythos oder *das* Dogma nicht; vielmehr dienen uns diese Begriffe lediglich als Hilfsmittel zur Umgrenzung von Beständen, die weder in sich für immer starr noch in ihrer Verklammerung ein für allemal fixiert sind. Es gibt da Entwicklungen und Transformationen, Potenzierungen und Reduktionen, Mutationen und Inversionen (Sommer 1987, 49)

Blumenberg refers to the Gnostic system as a *challenge*. Even though Blumenberg uses 'gnosis'/'Gnosticism' as a functional key of interpretation, his explicit point of departure is found in Marcion (ca. 85-160) who is declared to be "the greatest and most fascinating of the Gnostic thinkers" (LM 129/LN 141). The background for this evaluation is provided by the church historian Adolf von Harnack (1851-1930) who made the startling claim that "Catholicism was constructed against Marcion" (LM 130/LN 143). Crucial to Marcion's theology is a radical eschatological reservation regarding Creation. It offers, one could say, a possible solution to what Blumenberg continually refers to as the fundamental problem of Christianity, namely that "es ist schwer einzusehen, wie die neue Heilsbotschaft in irgend einem Verhältnis zur Idee der Weltschöpfung durch denselben Gott stehen konnte" (H 319). This is, in fact, just a variation of the problem of theodicy *avant la lettre*: How can there be evil in a world created by a benevolent God who no less than six times "saw that it was good" (Gen 1:3-23)? How can creation and redemption be integrated? Or: Why does a world, which has come from the hand of God, deserve destruction?

That is the dilemma which Marcion's theology addresses. And at the heart of the answer Marcion proposes to the problem of evil, is the theologically explo-

sive claim that the God of creation is *not* the God of redemption. To elaborate: Marcion's solution consists in a fundamental *separation* between the God who created the world of evil and suffering, and God the redeemer who is not a part of this world, but hidden behind his absolute otherness. Hence, the world is not created by God at all, but the result of a demon's evil deception. This Gnostic solution thus turns the original *Kosmosvertrauen* of antiquity completely upside down in order to a produce a theodicy:

> Marcion wanted to place his foreign God, free of the burden of responsibility for the world, entirely and without restriction on the side of man's salvation. The price for this was the attachment of a negative valuation to the Greek cosmic metaphysics and the destruction of the trust in the world that could have been sanctioned by the biblical conception of creation (LM 130/LN 142)

This Gnostic doctrine of two God's corresponds with an 'anthropological dualism', which can be expressed as follows: Humans are trapped in a cave – but they do not know it themselves (Sommer 1987, 44). This fundamental experience is a key element in Gnostic world and self-understanding. Plato's myth of the cave clearly forms the mythical framework. The paradox of the cave is, Blumenberg notes in his work *Höhlenausgänge* (1989), "dass man in einer Höhle nicht darstellen kann, was eine Höhle ist" (H 89). The Gnostic model of salvation bears imprint of a similar paradoxality: If human captivity is indeed as pervasive as the Gnostic's argue, how can the message of the saving God be obtained at all? How is it possible to obtain knowledge (γνώσις) about the foreign God in a situation dominated by all-encompassing ignorance in the obscure cell of the evil creator (*cellula creatoris*)?

This question forms the point of departure for the different Gnostic models of salvation. Human's cannot undertake their own salvation but must be released from outside; salvation presupposes an exogenous intervention. Just as it makes no sense to exert oneself to relax, one cannot see through an illusion that is total, all-embracing. In Larry and Andy Wachowski's science-fiction film, *The Matrix* (1999), the main character Thomas A. Anderson (alias Neo) is invited to choose

between a red and a blue pill by the mysterious figure, Morpheus. If he takes the blue pill he will wake up in his bed as if nothing ever happened. If he takes the red pill Morpheus will show him "how deep the rabbit hole goes" – i.e. show him to what extent the Matrix is actually a mould of illusion. *The Matrix* comprises a number of Gnostic features: Imprisonment, alienation, dualism – and their integration in a drama of salvation (Sommer 1987, 49). Even though Neo is given the *choice* between – roughly speaking – swallowing the pill of reality and that of illusion, the offer is brought to him from the 'outside' – or rather: from the 'inside' of the Matrix (from Latin: *mater*; 'mother'; 'uterus': the Matrix constitutes a membrane of ignorance). The pills (and thereby the possibility of choosing) are brought to him by Morpheus; but the *disposition to receive the message* does not come from the outside but are 'pre-given'. This resembles the paradox of the Gnostic situation. Humans cannot (actively, with intent) see through the complete delusion in which they live, but must be provided with insight (: γνώσις) from the 'outside': "Befreiung ist nich Selbstbefreiung, sondern ein Befreit-Werden" (Sommer 1987, 334). But even though humans cannot acquire this insight through their own power and decision-makings, they can at least prepare themselves for it. One could compare this situation with falling asleep. Merleau-Ponty offers an excellent description of this peculiar phenomenon in his *Phénoménologie de la perception* (1945):

> Je m'étends dans mon lit, sur le côté gauche, les genoux repliés, je ferme les yeux, je respire lentement, j'èloigne de moi mes projets. Mais le pouvoir de ma volonté ou de ma conscience s'arrête là. Comme les fidèles, dans les mystères dionysiaques, invoquent le dieu en mimant les scènes de sa vie, j'apelle la visitation du sommeil en imitant le souffle du dormeur et sa posture (...) Il y a un moment où le sommeil 'vient' (...) Sommeil, réveil, maladie, santé ne sont pas des modalités de la conscience ou de la volonté, ils supposent un 'pas existentiel' (Merleau-Ponty 1945, 191)

We do not intentionally decide to fall asleep; but we can prepare ourselves for it; we can take 'existential steps', as it were, towards it. The Gnostic situation is

comparable to the description offered by Merleau-Ponty, since it also stresses the *involuntary*, yet not completely passive character of salvation: Salvation obviously has to come from the outside; but that does not mean that humans cannot make themselves susceptible to it. How do humans – according to the Gnostic model – prepare themselves, make themselves susceptible to salvation? The answer can be formulated with Marquard: "Positivierung der Weltfremdheit durch Negativierung der Welt" (Marquard 1984, 32). By establishing a negative relation to the world, we are more susceptible to the salvation message of the foreign God.

To Plato, truth is 'self-illuminating' (*Selbst-ein-leuchtend*) and given with 'momentary irrefutability' (Cf. WbM 49) if only the human soul is turned towards it. It is a question about παιδεία (Cf. LaM 142). In the Socratic dialogue *Meno* the slave boy is brought to insight and knowledge about geometry through ἀνάμνησις – literally: Through 'a loss of forgetfulness'. The slave boy knows things that he could never have learned or heard about before. Hence, truth must be a bringing back, a re-collection of the eternal truths engraved into the human soul before birth. True knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) lies latently beneath the soul's surface; that is why Socrates' so-called 'maieutic method' is actually a theory of reminiscence (*re-minisci*: to recall to mind (*mens*)). Socrates only functions as a spiritual 'midwife' (μαιευτικός) for the slave whose knowledge has been carved into his soul from eternity.

To the Gnostics truth is something absolutely transcendent; light and darkness have become each others metaphysical counterforces which is reflected in Marcion's doctrine of the two God's. Truth is no longer a question about the passive 'contemplation' of eternal truths, but *dramatised*: Light becomes, as Blumenberg writes, a story: "Das Licht strahlt nicht mehr in die Welt, um sie zum Sein zu erwecken, sondern es geht in der fremden und feindlichen Sphäre verloren, es muss befreit und zu seinem Ursprung zurückgeführt werden" (LaM 153). The light of the world is artificial delusion; which only makes humans blind to the transcendent truth. Truth can no longer be represented metaphorically by the 'naturalness' of daylight, since the "divine sphere of majesty and the human sphere of need are clearly differentiated" (LM 305/LN 353-354). Salva-

tion basically means salvation *away from* the created, material world and *back to* the uncreated, spiritual origin. Gnosis is to find a way back home; to regain the lost and forgotten identity: "Gnosis ist Selbsterkenntnis, ist Identitätsfindung" (Sommer 1987, 333). But unlike Truman Burbank in the film *The Truman Show* (1998), who gradually realises *by himself* that the world in which he lives is in fact nothing but a gigantic reality show, an artificially constructed town broadcasted to the outside world day and night, the salvation model of Gnosticism presupposes an external, transcendent break-in. The evil demiurge is trying to keep the human soul trapped in oblivion about its real spiritual origin: "Ziel des bösen Demiurgen und seiner weltmächtigen Handlanger ist es, den Menschen seine verlorene Heimat zu vergessen zu lassen, ihn so in die Welt einzubinden, daß er zu einem völlig diesseitigen, kosmischen Wesen wird" (Sommer 1987, 332). Redemption is basically a question about enlightenment (*Aufklärung*) with regard to the impenetrably deceptive character of what only *appears* to be a cosmos. The Gnostic model of salvation thus appears paradoxical: It is only those who have already been offered insight into the world's fundamentally deceptive nature who can know what salvation consists of. The only interest that the Gnostics can have in this world, therefore, is to pass on the message about the foreign God (Sommer 1987, 354).

Gnostic thinking thus implies a strong emphasis on what has previously been described as the *absolutism of reality*. To live in a world of pervasive darkness, where even the brightness of stars is nothing but the deceptive instrument of the treacherous demiurge (CC 118), must lead to a sense of incisive existential homelessness. Whoever perceives oneself as incarcerated in an alien world of radical evil, must of course receive the message of salvation with considerable enthusiasm. Thus, Gnosticism is marked by a pronounced eschatological pathos and can be summed up as follows: "With respect to the Ancient world it disputed the status of cosmos as the embodiment of all reality that is binding in itself; with respect to Christianity it disputed the combination of creation and redemption as the work of a single God" (LM 129/LN 141). An important consequence of this basic Gnostic figure of thought is that the evil of the world is transformed into a question about the world's *persistence*. The problem is no

longer that the world is evil, since this has found its justification in the idea that *this* world is nothing but a dark prison, conceived by the malevolent Creator-God. The problem is rather that the expected *parousia* did not occur, that this world was *not* destroyed by the power of the good God:

> The world, which turned out to be more persistent than expected, attracted once again the old questions regarding its origin and its dependability and demanded a decision between trust and mistrust, an arrangement of life with the world rather than against it (…) The original eschatological pathos directed against the *existence* of the world was transformed into a new interest in the *condition* of the world [Welt*zustand*] (LM 131/LN 143-144)

### 2.3 Christianity between Creation and Annihilation

It is precisely this tension between Ancient cosmological metaphysics and the eschatological promise that constitutes the situation in which Christianity had to formulate its orthodoxy. Christianity had "to adjust itself to the rules and the game in the given and persisting world" (LM 131/LN 144). Hence, Christianity had to arrange itself in the surrounding world. In an early text, discussing the relation between antique philosophy and the Patristic, Blumenberg criticises the alternative between two historical models of explanation respectively orientating themselves with the metaphors 'persistence' (*Beharrung*) and 'irruption' *Einbruch* (KuR, 266): *Either* 'tradition' is considered to be something substantial that is persistently continued through the *reception* of (*in casu*) antique contents (*Gehalte*). *Or* the central metaphorical model used to 'explain' the origin of Christianity is that of *critique* understood as a sudden, violent or forceable entry of something completely new. Both these 'mechanical metaphors' are, Blumenberg explains, equally attestable – and therefore equally unconvincing. The alternative suggested by Blumenberg that can be seen as an attempt to balance these two antithetical positions, is a kind of functional *attachment-thesis* (the word *Anschluss* means something like 'to connect with', 'to interface', 'to annex').

It is obvious that language always defines a frame of what *can* be said; what is less obvious, however, is that language also stands under pressure from that

which *must* be said (EuR 101) i.e. the 'pressure of handed-over problems'. The important thing here is that Blumenberg makes the observation that the 'new' in history can never be something completely new – this idea is nothing but a 'theological *Grenzfiktion*' (KuR 268) – since it stands under pressure from the pre-given questions (i.e. expectations) to which it must form an answer. And this is more than a purely 'linguistic' problem:

> Mehr als eine 'Sprache' für das zu sagende Neue wird in der Rezeption gesucht; es geht darum eine appellable 'Wirklichkeit' zu gewinnen. Wirklichkeit ist immer das, worauf man sich unmittelbar berufen kann, ohne einer Beweisforderung gewärtig sein zu müssen; nur in Bezug auf gültige, fortgeltende Wirklichkeit kann sich eine neue Lebensform *realisieren*, selbst als diskutables Element mit anderen Einstellungen in Vergleich treten (KuR 268)

Early Christianity had to fix its attention on the persisting world. It had to express itself in a language that was already substantiated with meaning and significance and to adjust itself to a world that was already interpreted. Or, in short: It had to serve as an answer to already existing problems – without giving up its claim to be something 'new'. This first transformation of Christianity is described by Blumenberg as a *process of reception*. The remarkable fact that already the production of texts bears witness to a weakening of the original eschatological pathos is underlined in the following way by Blumenberg:

> Als das Christentum sich zu dokumentieren beginnt, ist seine Initialphase unbedingter Kritik, des eschatologischen Vorwegseins in der Aufhebung des Weltbestandes, schon vorüber; wer Dokumente schafft, richtet sich auf die Spielregelen einer vorgegebenen und fortbestehenden Welt ein (KuR 267)

According to Blumenberg, the attempt to retrieve the world as the creation from "the negative role assigned to it by the doctrine of its demiurgic origin, and to salvage the dignity of the Ancient cosmos for its role in the Christian system, was the central effort all the way from Augustine to the height of Scho-

lasticism" (LM 130/LN143). An important move in establishing a balance between creation and annihilation, i.e. in formulating an orthodoxy that can be seen as an attempt to 'dismantle' the inner-systematic tension, the "never balanced relation" (GkW333/GdK392) between creation and redemption can be found in Augustine, "the most important source and authority for the theological speculation of the later Middle Ages" (LM 135/LN 148).

### 2.4 Augustine: The First Attempt to Overcome Gnosticism

The formulation of a "new conservatism regarding the cosmos" (*Kosmoskonservatismus*) (LM 132/LN 144), a normative anti-Gnostic theology was the fruit of Augustine who himself was originally an adherent to Manichean Gnosticism. Gnosticism was not in need of a 'theodicy' simply because the good God didn't have anything to do with the evil in this world. Augustine passionately contests this Gnostic doctrine of two Gods. The God of creation and the God of redemption must be one and the same. Again, a transformation in the underlying light metaphorics helps illustrate how this idea finds expression. Light is *created* by God, arising out of the divine command: Let there be light! (*Gen* 1:3) Light cannot, as claimed by the Gnostics, be a manifestation of an eternal metaphysical proto-dualism between light and dark, since it is a result of God's demand and will. Moreover, Augustine raises the objection that the Gnostics do not distinguish adequately between the light that *is* God and the light, he has *created*: "Tu inluminabis lucernam meam, domine; deus meus, inluminabis tenebras meas", Augustine writes in his *Confessiones* (IV, 15.25). Since the world is created, it stands *in* the light of God; and the same goes for humans: "Der Mensch kann sich selbst nicht Licht sein (…) Der Mensch ist nicht Licht, sondern nur Leuchte, die am Licht entzündet wird" (LaM 157). The light of God penetrates everything and sheds light on the perfection of his creation. The place for the ignition of human light is the shaft of the human soul; it is the *memoria* (LaM 158). I return to this in chapter 4.2. Thus, *Genesis* became the point of departure for Augustine's rehabilitation of cosmos and the doctrine of creation the corner stone of his "Auseinandersetzung mit der Gnosis" (H 225). But in overcoming

the cosmological dualism of Gnosticism the question of evil was reactivated; if evil is not the result of an evil creator-God, what then?

The answer Augustine gives is simple enough: Humans, not God, are responsible for the evil in the world. Although the *world* is created by God; he didn't create evil. Evil is the result of human sin which again is the result of human disobedience – and ultimately the expression of an abuse of his God given freedom (H 313). The Augustinian answer to the question of evil (*unde malum?*) is: Evil does not come from God, but from human beings. The theological attempt to maintain a benevolent *Deus iustus* who is at the same time the creator of all reality takes place through an anthropological accusation which presupposes the 'invention' of a new concept of *freedom*. It should be noticed, however, that Augustine's concept of freedom is decidedly different from a 'modern' understanding of freedom: To Augustine the concept of freedom is not introduced in order to consolidate human dignity; it is not motivated *anthropologically.* Rather, it is the 'negative' consequence of a much more important *theological* headache regarding the question of evil in the world: God is only justified in so far as humans are free. Therefore humans must be free (CU 45-46). The problem of freedom is subordinate to the problem of theodicy; and, in this context, 'free' means: Responsible for the evil in the world. Only in *this* regard does Augustine's thinking represent a new construction of freedom. A construction which immediately raises the question: "Can man bear the burden of being responsible for the cosmos, that is, for seeing to it that God's design for His work does not miscarry?" (LM 134/LN 147). The systematic question, which is the result of Augustine's invention of human freedom, becomes: Is not human freedom, if made responsible for the evil in the world, itself something evil?

Augustine finds help for solving this theological problem in reading St. Paul's letter to the Romans, from which two cardinal points become embedded in Augustine's theological anthropology: The doctrine of original sin and the doctrine of predestination. These two doctrines function as the argumentative background for Augustine's elaboration of his orthodoxy. In the primordial state (*ante legem*) 'man' (*Adam*) was free not to sin (*posse non peccare*). With the original sin and the expulsion from paradise humans were imposed with an inescapable

'anthropogenic' injury that made sin unavoidable (*necessita peccandi*) and thereby suspended humans opportunity to avoid sin (*non posse non peccare*). According to Augustine, the defects in this world are nothing but the penalties that proceeded from (the abuse of) human freedom. Thus, the primary motivation for introducing human freedom is to exonerate God; it is a motive of theodicy: "The problematic of freedom is secondary; it is promoted from outside inward (…) The justice of the *deus iustus* is preserved as a premise, not as a consequence" (LM 133/LN 146). The idea of the benevolent, almighty God, who is absolutely guiltless with respect to the evil in this world, constitutes the indisputable point of departure and is not the result of Augustine's concept of freedom. Freedom is introduced for the relief of God. As Marquard has pointed out: "Das Desiderat der Entlastung des Schöpfergottes und seiner Welt führt im Mittelalter zur Erfindung und Fundamentalisierung der menschlichen Freiheit durch Augustinus: sie wird (…) post Christum natum et mortum das große Alibi des Schöpfergottes" (Marquard 1984, 32).

The point is, however, that the exoneration of God represents a *transposition* of a Gnostic pattern of thought. Augustine's two main doctrines – the doctrine of predestination and the doctrine of original sin – become functional *equivalents* to the cosmological dualism of Gnosticism. The attempt to justify God and His creation is not simply a restoration of the Ancient concept of cosmos but also implies the foundation of an eschatological model of history which has grace and redemption as its cardinal points. The dogma of original sin was, Blumenberg writes in *Work on Myth*, "the 'reoccupation' of the functional position of the demiurge, of the counterprinciple to the foreign or good god" (WM 199/AM 221). Blumenberg's claim thus is that Augustine, rather than overcoming the Gnostic threat, simply transposes it *ad hominem*:

> The Gnostic dualism had been eliminated as far as the metaphysical world principle was concerned, but it lived on in the bosom of mankind and its history as the absolute separation of the elect from the rejected. This crudity, devised for the justification of God, had its unspoken irony in the fact that the absolute principle's responsibility for cosmic corruption – the elimination of which had been the point

> of the whole exercise – was after all reintroduced indirectly through the idea of predestination (…) The Gnosticism that had not been overcome but only transposed returns in the form of the 'hidden God' and His inconceivable absolute sovereignty (LM 135/LN 148-149)

Augustine's attempt to overcome the cosmological dualism of the Gnostic results in a *functional re-occupation* of this very dualism; the first attempt to overcome the Gnostic challenge results in its re-appearance, its 'relapse' (*Rezidiv*) in the late Middle-Ages. That is the basic claim which Blumenberg tries to defend.

### 3. Theological Absolutism and Human Self-Assertion

What re-appears in the theological speculations of the late Middle Ages is a situation which has *structural* resemblances with the Gnostic 'consciousness of the world' (*Weltbewusstsein*). The starting point for Blumenberg's reflections is to be found in a change in the image of God (*Gottesbild*). Scholasticism was generally marked by an attempt to integrate Greek cosmological metaphysics and Christian belief in creation. The access to a comprehensive *corpus Aristotelicum* in high Scholasticism laid the foundation for a rethinking of the relation between God and world, necessity and possibility. Proofs of the existence of God, particularly as formulated and argued by Thomas Aquinas' (ca. 1225-1274), played a central role in this context. Thomistic thinking thus represents an attempt to integrate Aristotelian categories with a Christian conception of reality, that is, an attempt to harmonise faith and knowledge, theology and science.

In this context, the integration of the Aristotelian idea of an 'un-moved mover' (τὸ κινοῦν ἀκίνητον) with the basic Christian idea of creation *ex nihilo* represents a particular difficulty. The *concept* of God here runs counter to the *proofs* of God: Aristotle's conception of the 'un-moved mover' can only be proven under the presupposition that the world is eternal (*ex suppositione aeternitatis*). The Christian notion of a creation out of nothing would be unthinkable for Aristotle, because al creation presupposes change and change presupposes a world in which this change can take place. Hence, the world must be eternal. In

Aristotle's concept of eternity (ἀίδιος) both the idea of being ungenerated (ἀγένητος) and being indestructible (ἄφθαρτος) resound (Cf. *De caelo* I, X, 279b). But these ideas are in direct contravention of both the Christian-metaphysical idea that God as the *absolute* creator of the world *and* that this world deserves destruction. This scholastic 'dilemma' thus has to do with a divergence in the systematic interest in proving God on the one hand, and maintaining a certain concept of God on the other (Cf. SuB 178; CU 15). Despite Thomas' enthusiastic integration of Aristotelian categories and forms of reflection with Christian metaphysics, he does not offer a definitive proof for the creation in time: St. Thomas thus "maintained that none of the philosophical proofs adduced to prove that (…) creation took place in time, that there is, ideally, a first assignable moment of time, were conclusive" (Copleston 1950, 366). Also to Thomas the Aristotelian proof of the 'unmoved mover' necessarily rests on the presumption that the world is eternal – and thus on the exclusion of the very idea of creation (SuB 179).

The point of departure for Blumenberg's understanding of the late medieval period and its 'Gnostic' features is what he refers to as *theological absolutism*. A number of auxiliary concepts is introduced and discussed in relation to this expression which may help us shed light on its meaning and implications. Blumenberg relates theological absolutism to what he refers to as "disappearance of order" (*Ordnungsschwund*) (LM 137/ LN 150), "radical contingency" (LM 161/LN 181), and the nominalistic doctrine of *creatio continua* (Cf. SuB). How does theological absolutism relate to these different concepts?

### 3.1 Disappearance of Order

To speak about disappearance of order presupposes, of course, a certain concept of order. What do we mean by order? In an early text, Blumenberg gives an answer to this question by translating it into another: "Kann der Mensch darauf rechnen, dass in der Struktur der Welt auf ihn in irgendeiner Weise Rücksicht genommen ist?" (OS 38). Order is here (indirectly) related to purpose or teleology. That human beings occupy a certain place in the universe would be the

classical cosmological version of this train of thought. In numerous studies, eventually gathered together as *The Genesis of the Copernican World* (1975/1987) (which Blumenberg apparently himself regarded as his chief work (Cf. Bf 130)), Blumenberg treats the different metaphorical values ascribed to changes in different world models. Here a remarkable fact manifests itself: Changes in (mathematical) *world models* (*Weltmodelle*) – most prominently exemplified in Copernicus's heliocentric reform from 1543 – have continuously functioned as the point of departure for changes in *world images* (*Weltbilder*) (Cf. WW 69ff). 'World images' meaning the metaphorically mediated human self-understanding; i.e. 'answers' to the theoretically unanswerable questions about our 'cosmological' place and value, our self-location in the universe. Hence, astronomy has, it seems, always been intimately related to human self-understandings and thus served as *metaphorical diagrams* for human attempts to reach an understanding of himself and his world: "Geozentrik und Heliozentrik bzw. Azentrik werden zu Diagrammen, von denen abzulesen sein soll, was es mit dem Menschen auf der Welt auf sich hat" (PM 144-145). In and of themselves, scientific contributions and innovations only possess a secondary interest to Blumenberg. Rather, he is interested in highlighting what could be called astronomy's 'symbolic' or 'iconic value' (*Bildwert*) or its 'metaphorical potential' (PM 147; Behrenberg 1994, 31-42). That is the reason why Blumenberg refers to Copernicus as an 'absolute metaphor' (KW 127). References to Copernicus have constantly functioned as answers to a question which cannot be answered with theoretical-scientific means alone – namely the pragmatic question about the human's place (*Stellung*) and status (*Rang*) in the universe (PM 166).

The background for this understanding can be found in Nietzsche. Nietzsche embraces the melting down of all sorts of metaphysical backing, all forms of teleological comfort. Any idea of a teleological order is nothing but masked theology and, as such, is fatal since it threatens the very idea of genuine, human creation. Nietzsche explicitly understands Copernicus metaphorically, as a symbolic manifestation of "die Selbstverkleinerung des Menschen" (Nietzsche 1887, 893) and as such as a sign of the approach of nihilism: "Seit Kopernikus scheint der Mensch auf eine schiefe Ebene geraten – er rollt immer schneller nunmehr

aus dem Mittelpunkt weg – wohin? ins Nichts? ins "durchbohrende Gefühl seines Nichts"? (Nietzsche 1887, 893). Nietzsche here seems to voice an emblematic self-understanding with respect to the metaphorical interpretation of Copernicus: With Copernicus humans have lost their privileged place and status in the universe. The Copernican 'disappearance of order', which Nietzsche brings in contact with the birth of nihilism, is not considered a regrettable error. Since any confidence in 'pre-given' order is considered to be a fatal paralysis of the creative human power (OS 39), Nietzsche welcomes the nihilistic shock raised by Copernicus as a possibility to create new values. 'World construction', the creation of new, vigorous values thus goes hand in hand with the disappearance of order. The comforting belief in a pre-given order, a well-defined human *locus situs*, deprives human beings from strength and activity. As Blumenberg notes,

> Nietzsche formulated the situation of man in the 'disappearance of order', abandoned by natural providence and made responsible for himself, but he did so not in order to express disappointment at the loss of the cosmos but rather to celebrate the triumph of man awakened to himself from the cosmic illusion and to assure him of his power over his future (…) The destruction of trust in the world made him [i.e. man, UHR] for the first time a creatively active being, freed him from a disastrous lulling (*verhängnisvollen Beruhigung*) of his activity (LM 139/LN 152)

Now Blumenberg's guiding idea is that the late Middle Ages encapsulate the historical location of a fundamental disappearance of order. The theological absolutism implies the "destruction of trust in an ordered structure of the world" (LM 139/LN 151) and thus undermines any confidence in pre-given teleological principles and anthropocentric considerations. This theologically motivated disappearance of order forms the very starting point for a *human* attempt to re-establish order. The relation the between disappearance of order and the human attempt to regain it can therefore be characterised thus: "The zero point of the disappearance of order and the point of departure of the construction of order are identical; the minimum of ontological disposition is at the same time the

maximum of constructive potentiality" (LM 220/LN 251; Cf. OS 55). The disappearance of a metaphysical order, brought about by a concept of God reduced to omnipotence and arbitrariness (*Willkür*), calls forth the need for a human structure of order.

### 3.2 Radical Contingency

Contingency is another key concept which captures the specific situation in which late medieval theological absolutism found its articulation. This concept belongs to one of the few genuinely Christian concepts in the history of metaphysics even though it has its roots in the latinization of Aristotle's metaphysics (Cf. SuB 165-166):

> The medieval consciousness of the world is characterized by one of the few concepts of which it was the original producer, even though it used a term that had originally belonged to Aristotelian logic: 'Contingency' is the ontic condition of a world that was created from nothing, is destined for destruction, and is retained in its continuing existence only by the divine will (…) (GkW 140/GdK 168)

As already pointed out the idea of creation *ex nihilo* represents a fundamental break with Ancient ontology. To Ancient metaphysics the cosmos was the very essence of what was possible. Thus, the idea of a fundamental concordance between possibility and reality prevented the idea of genuine human creation unfolding itself. Humans cannot 'enrich' being – which is the pivotal idea lying behind the classical doctrine of *ars imitatur naturam* (Cf. NdN 23-24), and which has its roots in Aristotle's metaphysics. A corresponding idea of imitation is present in Plato's cosmogony where the ideas function as the eternal 'patterns' (παράδειγμα) and the necessary structuring principle which ensures that everything that the Demiurge carries out is done so in accordance with the eternal ideas, which thereby function as prototypes 'prescribing' how things *must* be. Furthermore, the Platonic cosmogony is not a *creatio ex nihilo*, but rather an 'unfolding' of the possibilities already present 'in' the world. Cosmos does not

leave any room for the idea of free and unbound creation of something genuinely 'new'.

Seen in this light, the Judeo-Christian understanding of creation has a quite different point of departure. Creation is the expression of a divine act of will. The world becomes, with a technical philosophical term, *contingent*. That the world is contingent means that it doesn't carry the mark of necessity ascribed to it in antique metaphysics: It might *not* have been. Its actuality is based solely on the unabridged freedom of the divine power that created it. That is the reason why Blumenberg underlines that contingency belongs to one of the few genuinely Christian notions in the history of Western metaphysics (Cf. SB 165). The expression 'contingentia' is derived from the Latin translation of Aristotle's term ἐνδεχόμενον (which is often used synonymous with δυνατόν, possible). It is related to *statements* about possible future events – for instance a coming sea battle (the well-known discussion of *futura contingentia* in relation to a sea-battle in *De Interpretatione*, chapter 9). The only important thing here is that Boethius' translation of and comments on Aristotle's Περὶ Ἑρμηνείας becomes the pivotal point of departure for the theological discussions about God's absolute power and freedom: The unavoidable confrontation between a Christian concept of God and the reading of *De Interpretatione* became a fire of intellectual controversy and Jean Isaac even argues that "[l]a vie intellectuelle du haut moyen âge aurait (...) été sensiblement modifié, semble-t-il, si Boèce s'était abstenu de traduire le Peri hermeneias" (Isaac 1953, 37).

Whereas the question about future contingencies originally had a limited linguistic (or 'logical') significance it eventually led to a *theological* re-framing of the question of contingency with important *metaphysical* implications; contingency became the term in which God's unlimited creative capacity was given expression. Blumenberg locates a radicalisation of the idea of contingency in the late medieval period by thinkers such as Duns Scotus (ca. 1266-1308) and William of Ockham (ca. 1288-1348). His basic idea is that a new, almost delirious focus on God's *power* (*Macht*) and *freedom* (*Freiheit*) gave occasion for a radical outburst of contingency which designated a significant change in human self- and world-understanding. In a sense, Nominalism only radicalises the system-

atic conflict between transcendence and rationality which traverses the history of medieval Scholasticism. The intensification in this conflict over the metaphysical question of contingency is given a surprisingly precise historical context by Blumenberg:

> The internal systematic conflict came into the open in 1277, when Etienne Tempier, the Bishop of Paris, condemned a list of propositions that as a whole reflected the conclusions of the thirteenth century's completed reception of Aristotle. Three years after the death of the classic author of High Scholasticism, Thomas Aquinas, his acceptance of the Aristotelian proof of the uniqueness of the world was condemned as a philosophical restriction of divine omnipotence. This document marks the exact point in time when the interest in the rationality and human intelligibility of creation cedes priority to the speculative fascination exerted by the theological predicates of absolute power and freedom (LM 160/LN 178-179)

The mentioned decree, which signalled the decisive "turning of Scholasticism against its Aristotelian integration" (GkW 478/GdK 555), basically contests the assumption that God could not have created several worlds (*quod prima causa non posset plures mundos facere*). Seen in the light of God's unrestricted omnipotence it becomes an impenetrable mystery why God "dieses und kein anderes Stäubchen aus dem Meer der unendlichen Möglichkeit herausgriff" (CU 51). It was against the Aristotelian assumption that the world was necessarily and uniquely one that this statement opposed itself. God's power is absolute (*absolvere*: to set free, loose from) that is: Not dependent on or restricted by anything; eventually not even the principles of logic. In other words: Aquinas' recognition of Aristotle's proof of the uniqueness (*Einzeigkeit*) of the world falls under suspicion of being heretic and is thus condemned as a scandalous philosophical reduction of divine omnipotence. Hence, the conflict between cosmology and theology found its 'sensitive spot' in a "vigilant defence" of divine omnipotence (GkW 481/GdK 558). Whereas the theological main focus had been directed towards the fundamental *order* of the world, its perfection and harmony, the interest is now displaced and directed towards God's unbound *will* and

magisterial *power*. This shift from a 'natural theology' to a 'theological absolutism' in which God's limitless omnipotence comes into the centre of speculation, may be illustrated by means of the problem of universals.

As mentioned, High Scholasticism was marked by a theological agenda to reconcile faith and knowledge, and it was to this end that proofs of the existence of God played an important role. To the contemporary reader these efforts to prove God's existence and necessity may well seem like profitless dialectic juggling acts, futile efforts in a logic completely divorced from physical reality. One must, however, try to make the underlying premises behind these efforts clear to avoid a thoughtless banalisation of medieval thinking. That concepts do not refer to independent dimensions of reality has become so obvious a part of modern philosophical self-understanding that it can be very difficult to acquire an understanding that it should ever have been different. Nevertheless, that is what an influential metaphysical tradition maintains. This kind of metaphysical realism regarding concepts (*Begriffsrealismus*) which has its historical roots in Plato's doctrine of ideas, argues that universals have a 'transcendent' reality and 'in themselves' point to what is real. Universals are not simply arbitrary human thought products, synthetic schemes of human understanding, but independent dimensions of reality that exists prior to particulars (*universalia ante rem*). Hence, conceptual knowledge is *per definizione* knowledge about reality. Just as one can be more or less blind (or well sighted) concepts can have a greater or lesser degree of reality. This idea of different degrees of reality – a hierarchy of realities – is also the underlying condition behind the ontological argument for the existence of God.

In Daniel Defoe's classic novel, *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), the castaway Robinson one day discovers foreign footsteps in the sand on his un-inhabited island. From these footsteps he infers that there must be other than himself on the island. The footsteps belong, it turns out, to an escaped prisoner who Robinson names Friday. Here, Friday's footsteps function as a kind of empirical principle of deduction. In the technical language of Scholasticism, Robinson infers from one kind of *esse in re* to another. The traces in the sand give evidence about the existence of somebody else. In contrast, the ontological argument for the existence of God

does not infer from one empirical fact to another, but from the *concept* of God to this concept's reality; from the concept of God's *esse in mente* to its *esse in re*. This argument, however, requires a realistic 'solution' to the problem of universals. Rational proofs of the existence of God presupposes an underlying assumption that there is reason both 'in' humans and 'in' the world: In order for the natural light of human reason (*lumen naturalis*) to comprehend – illuminate – the rational structures in the world it must somehow be in concordance with it. One could perhaps illustrate this point with the following image: The word 'candle light' is derived from two different Latin words for 'light' – namely *lux* and *candela*. The basic assumption underlying the rational proofs of God seems to be that in order for human reason to shine it necessarily must be 'rooted' in a rational order, i.e. it must ground in an ontological order which makes vision possible in the first place. Just like light (*lux*) must be rooted in a wax candle (*candela*) in order to shine, human knowledge (*ordo cognoscendi*) must be rooted in an ontological order (*ordo essendi*) – and true knowledge consists in bringing these two systems of reason in accordance with each other (*adequatio rei et intellectus*). That there is rationality in humans (*ratio*), the world (*logos*) and God (*theos*) thus constitutes the unspoken assumption behind *rational theo-logy*.

Now, Blumenberg's main point is that these Scholastic efforts to prove God's creative omnipotence and necessary existence in fact revealed an internal systematic conflict in the Scholastic systems:

> Here was the common ground of all the paradoxes of Scholasticism: it could not remove from the world anything that was essential to the functioning of the system of proofs of God's existence, but neither could it commit divinity to this world as the epitome of its creative capacity (*als den Inbegriff ihres schöpferischen Könnens*) (LM 160/LN 178)

And that is precisely the paradox: On the one hand, God's omnipotence subverts any limits of his unfolding; on the other hand, God must be assigned a certain degree of intelligible order and transparency in order for the proofs of his existence to function. Where the fascination with God's absolute power (*po-*

*tentia absoluta*) occupies the speculative mind most intensely, the idea of universals – the traditional surface of contact between humans and the eternal – must be abandoned. What are the universals but illegitimate barriers to God's unrestrained freedom and his right to dispose of reality? That the world is created by measures, numbers and weight (*omnia in mensura, et numero et pondere disposuisti*) as written in *The Book of Wisdom* (11.21), becomes a theologically precarious reduction of God's sovereignty. The vehement criticism of the Scholastic proves of God, which unfolded itself among the Nominalists of the Late Middle Ages, can be understood as a theologically motivated insistence on God's absolute power over the created. Truth *cannot* any longer be human reason's correspondence to a transcendent, divine reality. If the aim of Scholasticism generally was to bring into agreement the "two books" (Leg 54) – the book of nature and the book of revelation – by demonstrating the compatibility of the sacred text and Aristotelian metaphysics, the Nominalist relation to God is displaced uniquely to revelation. This displacement is based precisely on the concept of omnipotence and its opposition to any 'natural' limits: The fixation of the Creator of the universe on things the way they are, and the limitation of his freedom to the factual contingency of things becomes increasingly difficult to maintain when the real is understood merely as "a particle of the infinitely possible" (*einer Partikel der Unendlichkeit des Möglichen*) (Leg 56). Concepts are now mere 'names' (*nomina*), i.e. synthetic schemes of orientation and principles of economy, not human's connection to divine reality: "Der Mensch versteht die Sprache der Schöpfungsmonolog nicht mehr" (KW 76; Cf. CU 35). Human knowledge must recognise its theological irrelevance and mere 'hypothetical' character. Theological absolutism thus denies "man any insight into the rationality of the Creation" (LM 149/LN 164).

Even though Ockham distinguishes between God's *potentia ordinate* and his *potentia absoluta* this does not imply, Blumenberg argues, that humans after all have access to the gratuitousness of creation since God's restriction to his *potentia ordinate* only has direct relevance "to the path of salvation, not to the path of knowledge" (LM 154/LN 171). To be more precise: Blumenberg's claim is that Nominalism's denial of universals has the implication that the theological dis-

tinction between God's *potentia ordinata* and his *potentia absoluta* eventually becomes, at least seen from a human point of view, indiscernible. Moreover, the "secrecy (*Verborgenheit*) of the divine decrees of election and rejection" (LM 171/LN 193) re-actualizes a Gnostic dualism. Not only does it set up a barrier between those who are redeemed and those who are condemned; it also – and more importantly – maintains that there is no way to attain philosophical security about wheter one belongs to the predestined for salvation or to the hopelessly condemned, the *massa damnata*. This security rests strictly on the assumption of faith and grace. Nominalism thereby posits "the path of grace (*Gnadenweg*) as absolute" (LM 540/LN630); an idea which Luther later adopts and formulates in his treatise *De servo arbitrio* (1525): Man's salvation depends entirely "on the free judgment, the decision, will and work of another, namely God alone" (LM 541/LN 630). Even though it is incontestable that the differentiation between God's *potentia ordinata* and his *potentia absoluta* was carefully maintained by the Nominalist thinkers, it nonetheless broke down the intelligibility of this differentiation by circumscribing the role of human reason and eliminating reason's accessibility to any pre-given order: "Philosophy has no access to this security; its considerations stand under the assumption, rendering everything insecure, of the *potentia absoluta*" (LM 172/LN 194). In other words: "The radical insecurity of voluntarism" (LM 567/LN 662) functions as the background for the establishment of a *human* attempt to regain order and security.

Although it would be wrong to simply *identify* these nominalistic ideas about the *theoretical* inaccessibility to Creation with Kant's distinction between the world 'for us' (*für uns*) and the world 'in itself' (*an sich*), Kant's thinking nonetheless can be seen as a late reflection on an theological problem initiated in late medieval Nominalism. Thus, Kant's requirement that reason must stay within the horizon of (possible) experience can be regarded as a discovery made "with the aid of the Scholastic concept of the *veritas ontologica* that is proper to God, and carried over to man by the Modern Age" namely the assumption that "the truth of a thing is only accessible to him who made it" (WM 170-171/AM 189). The central role ascribed by Blumenberg to Late medieval Nominalism for the constitution of the Modern Age should not primarily be understood as a transfer

of a particular *content* of thought but rather be seen as the creation of a new 'room' for answers and questions. Nominalism thus created a new consciousness of problems; it raised a new catalogue of questions and gave new room for answering them. That the theological absolutism of late medieval Nominalism in this way involved a disconnection of 'knowledge' and 'faith' induced by the doctrine of omnipotence is the main point suggested by Blumenberg.

### 3.3 Creatio continua

When Blumenberg refers to the late Middle Ages as 'Gnostic' it is because its theological absolutism displays *structural* similarities with the Gnostic situation previously described. The idea of omnipotence implies the infinity of the possible; it calls forth a fundamental split between the impotence of human reason, "the powerlessness of finite reason" (LM 162/LN 181) and absolute divine sovereignty and "creative abundance" (LM 153/LN 170). This dualism is not a metaphysical dualism like the Gnostic but its "practical equivalent *ad hominen*" (LM 154/LN 171). One might get an impression of the radicalism of these speculative considerations by considering the following entertaining thought experiment (from *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*), set forth by the nominalist Jean Buridan (ca. 1295-1358): "Alte Frauen haben auf die Frage, ob der allmächtige Gott bewirken kann, daß sie gleichzeitig essen und nicht essen, sitzen können und nicht sitzen können, geantwortet, sie wüßten es nicht, denn er könne alles bewirken" (Kobush 1994, 595). Even the principle of contradiction must be rejected as an illegitimate restriction of God's omnipotence. Augustine's understanding of creation had taken place by means of the conceptual resources of Ancient metaphysics (Plato in particular). Even though the idea of a creation *ex nihilo* marked a pronounced break with antique metaphysics, Augustine still considered creation within a Platonic paradigm. Hence, the Platonic idea of an all-encompassing ideal order (*mundus intelligibilis*) means that the divine will, which stands behind creation, is in fact thrown upon the idea of a fixed totality of possibilities:

> Der göttliche Willensakt, der die Schöpfung beschließt, kann sich nur auf die fixierte Totalität des einen Ideenkosmos beziehen; also nur das *Dass* der Schöpfung, nicht ihr *Was* ist *faktisch* geworden. Der Begriff der *Allmacht* ist bei *Augustin* noch nicht in Berührung gekommen mit dem Begriff der *Unendlichkeit* (NdN 31)

That the world has become 'factual' (*faktisch*) means that its existence is 'groundless'; the pure fact that there is something rather than nothing is ultimately an expression of God's absolute will. But even though the *existence* of the world is due to God's will, its essential features are not, since God's power is not interpreted by means of the concept of infinity. In other words, Augustine's understanding of creation was informed by the conceptual resources of Greek metaphysics and thus expounded "mit den kategorialen Mitteln der Strukturschemas der 'Nachahmung'" (NdN 22). The idea of *radical* contingency, on the other hand, presupposes that the idea of infinity is brought in relation to divine omnipotence.

Theological absolutism comes also to the fore in the idea that the world is in permanent need for external, divine preservation. Moreover, Blumenberg traces symmetry between *creation* and *conservation* which forms the background for two technical Scholastic terms which both stresses the radical contingent character of the world: *creatio continua* and *concursus divinus* (SB 157). Blumenberg points in this context to the idea that the world is continuously and utterly dependent on God. In the theology of Ockham God is not only understood as creator of the world, but also conceived as the one who maintains the world in every moment. This amounts to a transformation and radicalization of the idea of *creatio ex nihilo* since the *nihil* is now understood as the metaphysical normal state (*Normalzustand*) and God's constant intervention is intended to be the 'miracle' without which the world would be destroyed and collapse:

> Neben der Begriffsökonomie, die Ockham daran hindert, zwischen Schöpfung und Erhaltung eine Differenz zuzulassen, spielt in der voluntaristischen Konzeption des Gottesbegriffes eine noch größere Rolle die Symmetrie zwischen *creatio* und *annihilatio* (…) Die Kontingenz der Schöpfung ist über die Bedürftigkeit nach Erhaltung hinaus

> verschärft zur Möglichkeit der Vernichtung, insofern Gott seine Allmacht nicht dadurch beschränkt, dass er sie ausübt (SB 180-181)

'Ockham's razor' – the principle of economy (*lex parsimoniae*) which states that any explanation must make as few assumptions as possible (*entia non sunt multiplicanda preaeter necessitatem*), that it must not multiply explanatory entities in excess of the necessary minimum – must be seen in the light of these speculations in regard to divine omnipotence. If God's omnipotence manifests itself fully in the world then human reason is in need of an artificial system of conceptual damming that reduces the abundance of possibilities. The fission between human 'thought economy' and divine abundance marks the entire nominalistic theory of knowledge (LM 349/LN 407). The sparse reason of human beings is thus contrasted with "die verschwenderische Großzügigkeit der Schöpfung" (TU 20), and human reason becomes the manifestation of an enforced self-assertion. Order is not something *given* in nature, but something *imputed* to it by humans (LM 154/LN 170). Human and divine reason are disintegrated. The conceptual resources of human reason are no longer the self-assured 'relay station' between the authentic, divine reality and the sphere of restrained human knowledge; instead they are both indispensable and inappropriate auxiliary human constructs (*Hilfskonstruktion*). According to Blumenberg, the idea of a one-time world creation (*creatio ex nihilo*) is amplified into a doctrine of continuous creation (*creatio continua*) which points to the radical contingency of the world (KW 19). Since the world does not exist by itself but constantly must be maintained by God, the threat unavoidably presents itself that God abstains from this maintenance. That this is *not* the case depends solely on God's inscrutable will and gratitude – a state of uncertainty marked by appalling arbitrariness which calls into mind the Gnostic situation. What started as *logic*, conceptual considerations pertaining to contingency, is now received a *metaphysical* unfolding. The amalgamation of infinity and omnipotence, which had begun already in the 11th Century by Petrus Damiani (ca. 1007-1072), eventually called forth what Blumenberg somewhat dramatically refers to as "Faktizitätsangst" (NdN 36). The initial speculative fascination with God's omnipotence found its

affective and existential manifestation in a new radical insecurity of man's relation to reality:

> Man spürt geradezu, wie hier ein quälendes, bohrendes Bewusstsein der Faktizität entspringen muss, die anschwellende Frage, weshalb *diese* und keine *andere* Welt ins Sein gerufen wurde, eine Frage, der nur noch das nackte augustinsche *Quia voluit* als Un-Antwort entgegengeschleudert werden konnte (NdN 39)

The nominalistic doctrine of time – the doctrine of *creatio continua* and the world's constant need for divine, 'external' preservation (*concursus Dei*) – displays the radically contingent character of the world. Here time is made into "a dimension of utter uncertainty" (LM 161/LN 181) which puts all rational constants in question. The theological attribute of omnipotence thereby obtains its destructive power, its undermining of human certainty and thus eventually bears witness to "the indifference of divinity toward man" (LM 171/LN 193). The medieval concept of contingency has rearranged the position between God and world; God's continuous creation was the only reason "for the non-non-existence of the world" (SuB 190). The late medieval doctrine of *creatio continua* constitutes a radicalisation of the world's ultimate dependence on its divine Creator.

The (phenomenological) thesis about the continuity of history – and the absence of absolute new beginnings in history, discussed in Part I – can be illuminated by considering the thought of Descartes who, in keeping with the theme of this reflection on the origins of modernity, is usually accorded the title: Father of modern philosophy.

*Unhistorisch kann ein Zeitalter nur sein,*
*weil es 'geschichtlich' ist.*
M. Heidegger[20]

[20] M. Heidegger: *Sein und Zeit*, (Max Niemeyer Verlag: Tübingen 1993), p. 20 (§ 6).

### 3.4 Descartes' God and the Attempt to Forget the Past

The idea of a completely new beginning, a historical *point zero*, expresses a new and changed self-consciousness, which is not only characteristic of Descartes' self-understanding, but is emblematic of the Modern Age as such (Hegel, for instance, thus lionises Descartes as the founding figure in the evolution of modern consciousness). The German expression *die Neuzeit* literally means 'the new time' and it is telling, as Blumenberg underlines, that *die Neuzeit* gave itself this name (VdN, 81) thereby repeating a medieval train of thought in a different guise: The idea that history has an absolute, historical point of origin. Whereas this historical point zero was defined by divine incarnation – as a transcendent point of impact, of something completely new – the establishment of a new era is now delegated to human hands; or, more precisely: To human reason.

In Descartes' *Metaphysical Meditations* (1641), the idea of creating a completely new world is manifest in the discrete argumentative structure of the work itself: The six meditations reflect the first six days in which God created the world. Descartes is not reluctant to suggest that his own philosophical innovation is comparable with God's creation of the world out of nothing (*ex nihilo*), based, as it is, on *nothing* besides human reason itself. Descartes wanted to "cast aside the loose earth and sand in order to find rock or clay" (*à rejeter la terre mouvante et le sable, pour trouver le roc ou l'argile*) (Descartes 1637, 599) and therefore undertook an attempt to 'throw down' all traces of impact, to obliterate his historical background. In undertaking this attempt he nonetheless reveals himself as a historically indebted thinker who is, in truth, not nearly as detached from tradition as he claims to be. Blumenberg makes several telling observations in this regard.

Descartes reinterprets, in a sense, Plato's myth of the cave. In Descartes's version, the exit from the cave becomes the way out of tradition: Taking leave of all opinions and prejudices. In order for reason to have a radical new beginning it must first put down (*jetter par terre*) all the carried-over cargo of thought. Exit from the cave therefore basically means the entrance into a new era (Cf. H 427-447). Moreover, the artificial play of light and shade in Plato's cave (performed by Sophists) is re-occupied by Descartes famous idea of the malicious spirit (*genius malignus*) deceiving human reason. Descartes' evil God is, however, nothing

but a translation of the theological absolutism of omnipotence into a philosophical hypothesis (LM 184/LN 209). How can this claim be substantiated? First of all, Descartes' thinking merely 'stages' meditatively what late medieval Nominalism had already called attention to: Knowledge is divine, to err is human; God has *episteme*, humans only *doxa* (Sommer 1987, 204). Furthermore, Descartes takes over the Nominalistic conception of time introduced above: The *cogito* is only accorded momentary evidential security. Human identity is thereby dissolved into a chain of separate, detached momentary 'ego-cogito'-evidences without any mutual connection or continuity. Or rather, *would have been* dissolved were God not constantly intervening and conserving me, as Descartes writes:

> Car tout le temps de ma vie peut être divisé en une infinité de parties, chacune desquelles ne dépend en aucune façon des autres; et ainsi, de ce qu´un peu auparavant j´ai été, il ne s´ensuit pas que je doive maintenant être, si ce n´est qu´en ce moment quelque cause me produise et me crée, pour ainsi, derechef, c´est-à-dire me conserve (Descartes 1641, 450)

Descartes here seems to subscribe to the Nominalistic conception of time. The only thing that withstands any doubt, namely Descartes' *ego cogito*, is granted only momentary evidence. Descartes's meditating consciousness does not find anything 'within' that can secure its preservation; it doesn't encounter any force to exist by itself (*vis per se existendi*) (SB 148). To Descartes creation is the constitution of reality "in *jedem* Augenblick" (SB 183) and therefore nothing ensures that what lies 'outside' the immediately given momentary field of evidence is in fact not the victim of deception. Time is namely not conceived as a flowing continuous stream but as individually separated, discrete time particles. Time has no permanence or continuity. The strange implication of this seems to be that evidence is only to be had on punctual premises. As Manfred Sommer has pithily observed, time means: "Now. Now. Now. Now…" (Cf. Sommer 1987, 247). Human self-identity is thereby pulverized into a chain of discrete instants. Or again: *Would have been* were not each moment created and produced by 'some

cause', as Descartes writes. But how does Descartes know, that the 'cause' who conserves him is not a deceiving god? The problem is bound up in Descartes understanding of memory.

According to Descartes memory is thoroughly mendacious (*mendax memoria*). In the very beginning of his second meditation, Descartes thus rejects his memory as fallacious (*ma mémoire remplie de mensonges me représente*) (Descartes 1641, 415). But here a problem arises. In order to demonstrate what is needed in order to *exceed* the momentary evidence of the *ego cogito* Descartes needs a certain God – an out-and-out good and truthful God (*veritas Dei*) in whom he can trust. This God is needed in order to *guarantee* the 'reality' of (human) reason and cognition. The problem is, however, that even the inference from *cogito* to *ergo sum* presupposes a certain temporal 'extension', it presupposes *retention*. But Descartes explicitly denies that memory – even in its most 'contracted', retentional version – is trustworthy. And this is exactly Descartes dilemma: "dass der Gott, den Descartes braucht, um über das *cogito*-Jetzt ohne Evidenzverlust hinausgehen zu können, *bewiesen* wird in einem Prozess des Denkens, den es ohne Retention gar nicht geben kann" (Sommer 1987, 249). This has the implication that for Descartes time becomes a dimension of utter uncertainty, the "crucial handicap" of "human spirit" (LM 162/LN 181).

These considerations have both a systematic and a historical point: Descartes conception of time is *systematically* misguiding since it belongs to the very structure of human consciousness to have a certain, 'deception resistant' form which has its own inherent retentional evidence. Thus, even "der schnellste Schnelldenker" is in need of some time in order to move from the premises to the conclusion (Sommer 1987, 250). Furthermore, Descartes' is *historically* indebted to a specific time theory – namely the nominalistic *creatio continua* doctrine – and thereby reveals himself as less detached from tradition as he claims to be. Another point here is that Descartes' concept of reality according to Blumenberg appears considerably more medieval than modern. This concept of reality is referred to by Blumenberg as *guaranteed reality* and presupposes a *third, mediating instance* between 'subject' and 'object' – namely God (WbM 50-51). Descartes is thus "still entirely bound to the traditional concept of reality" since he operates

with the idea of "a metaphysical guarantee" (LM 186/LN 212). Descartes thereby merely transforms the "late medieval crisis of certainty" (*Gewissheitskrise*) into "an experiment with certainty" (*Gewissheitsexperiment*):

> Thus Descartes' very concept of reality differs from that of modern philosophy in a way that makes Descartes appear not so much as the founding figure of the epoch but rather as the thinker who clarified the medieval concept of reality all the way to its absurd consequences and thus made it ripe for destruction (LM 187/LN 213)

Descartes hypothesis of a *genius malignus* thus appears a radicalisation of the Nominalistic idea of the *potentia absoluta*. According to Blumenberg, Descartes only made the implications of theological absolutism "crucially more explicit" and developed them into "such an acute threat" that a "basis for resistance could now only be found in absolute immanence" (LM 195/LN 223). The 'father of rationalism' (whose discovery in 1619 of a 'wonderful science' (*mirabilis scientiae*), by the way, took place in a feverish dream in Ulm; not exactly a 'rational' place for the birth of rationalism (Cf. H 431) undertook a careful attempt to maintain the myth about his philosophy's radical break from all tradition.[21] And yet, in more than one regard, he exposed himself as bound to tradition. Does this example not point to a more fundamental difficulty related to the attempt to undertake an absolute beginning? Descartes' vigilant effort to forget his past is, paradoxically enough, exactly what brings to light his dependence on this very past. Besides the Nominalistic time theory, the idea of an all-powerful God who may annihilate what appears to man to exist, Descartes also operates with the basic assumption that reality must be guaranteed (from Old French: *garir*, *guarir* to protect, preserve (Cf. 'garage'; 'garderobe')) by a 'third' metaphysical entity.

[21] Blumenberg points to the fact that Descartes deliberately tried to efface the traces of his historical background by passing over in silence an important meeting with Isaak Beeckmann in Breda 1618 from whom he allegedly gained acquaintance with the "'Leonardo tradition' of deplatonized mathematics" which, according to Blumenberg, means that his "pretended break with tradition" was in fact actually "a change of traditions" (LM 615/LN 211).

This illustrates that Descartes involuntarily, so to speak, exemplifies what according to Blumenberg must always be the case in history: That there can be no absolute beginnings in history (*Geschichte heißt, dass es keine Anfänge nach dem Anfang gibt*) (LZ 356). The allegedly new beginning in Descartes was not really a beginning at all, something which manifests itself most evidently in what he overlooked (Cf. LC 433). The role ascribed to Descartes as a heroic zero-point figure of the Modern Age in the history of philosophy is thereby dismantled: Descartes' "extreme desire" to obtain firm philosophical ground under his feet and thereby being able "to go forward with confidence in this life" (*marcher avec assurance en cette vie*) (Descartes 1637, 577) does not constitute a radical historical break but finds its 'external' motivation in the fundamental crisis of assurance which had been announced in Nominalistic theology understood exactly as "a system of extreme uneasiness" (*ein System höchster Beunruhigung*) (LM 151/LN 167, my translation). Seen in this light, the spirit of Descartes's subject philosophy appears less as reason's autonomous self-foundation than an "unavoidable counterexertion" (LM 177/LN 201) against the alarming loss of security characterising the late medieval system.

### 3.5 Sphere Implosion: Sloterdijk and the Death of God

Peter Sloterdijk has identified some of the same endogenous mechanisms in the theological systems of the late medieval period. In his immense and provocative trilogy *Sphären I-III* (1998-2004) Sloterdijk portrays what he calls the 'paradoxes of immunity' (*Immunparadoxien*) (Sloterdijk 1999, 594) related to the theology of high Scholasticism and the late Middle Ages. *Sphären* is an exceptionally broad attempt to re-describe mankind's different experiences of space – a kind of "onto-climatology" (Sloterdijk 1999, 146); a theory of life (referred to by Sloterdijk as 'bio-sophy' (Cf. Sloterdijk 2004, 25)) which focuses on the production of spaces of immunity (*Immunraum-Produktionen* (Ibid 248). 'Immunity' is a very broad title for the various cultural ways in which human beings attempt – whether psychologically, politically, theologically, technically, biologically – to protect themselves from the overwhelming 'outside'. Sloterdijk's main question

is not the traditional one posed by philosophical anthropology: *What* is a human being? But the topological: *Where* are human beings? Whereas Heidegger (in *Sein und Zeit* [§ 83]) argued that *time* constitutes the horizon of being, Sloterdijk claims that *space* is the most important 'existential' (Cf. Sloterdijk 1998, 639ff). 'Immunology' provides a metaphor for the production of human *spaces of immunity* – and one very influential way of making the world inhabitable by creating spaces of immunity is by means of theological models of protection.

According to Sloterdijk, God can thus be regarded as a result of human's effort to secure himself, as a 'psycho-cosmological immune system' (Sloterdijk 1999, 412), whose main role is to act as a kind of imaginative membrane ensuring the border between 'nothingness, outside and infinity' (Ibid 128). The labile compromises between Aristotelian metaphysics and Christian theology resulted in a growing fascination with the infinite which ultimately produced a God of infinity, i.e. a "Theo-mathematical monster" (*theo-mathematischen Monstrum*) (Ibid 553) – Sloterdijk's parallel to Blumenberg's theological absolutism. According to Sloterdijk, God's function as a guarantor of immunity breaks down when he is conceived of as infinite, because his immunological main function – namely to distinguish between 'inside' and 'outside' and to somehow figuratively represent totality – is dissolved. God becomes incomprehensible, formless, and incommensurable with anything human – "ein Monstrum für das menschliche Anschauungsvermögen" (Ibid 131). The 'death of God' therefore is in fact a morphological tragedy:

> Es waren die klügsten Theologen, die Gott getötet haben, als sie es nicht mehr unterlassen konnten, ihn als den aktuell und extensiv unendlichen zu denken. Der Satz ‚Gott ist tot' bezeichnet an erster Stelle eine morphologische Tragödie – die Vernichtung der imaginär genugtuenden, anschaulichen Immunitätskugel durch unerbittliche Infinitisierung (Ibid. 131)

As the theological experts of totality began conceiving God's transcendence as infinite, as "that greater than which it is impossible to conceive anything greater" (*quo maius cogitari nequit sed*) or even more drastically: "as something

greater than can be conceived" (*maius quam cogitari posit*), as Anselm famously stated in his *Proslogion* (Cf. LM 489/LN 564), they inadvertently exposed the aforementioned paradox of immunity: In order for God to function as the absolute guarantor of security, man must first renounce any attempt at protecting himself, i.e. he must first give up any *human interest* in God since that would be a theologically illegitimate restriction of God's infinity. Humans must therefore see themselves handed over to God's boundlessly opaque will. Such an exceedingly distant and unbelievably-infinite God is, however, in imminent danger of making himself dispensable. "Mit den Ansprüchen an die Versicherung inflationiert der Schrecken" (Ibid 595). God becomes a masochist of whom nothing can be expected since any expectation to God at the same time would compromise his majestic sovereignty. In short: Where God's absolute power is infinitely radicalised, his primary function as a guarantor of immunity implodes. In Sloterdijk's melodramatic descriptions the 'death of God' thus becomes the unintended result of a "man-made climate catastrophe" (Ibid 591); the death of God is the result of an intellectual "Übermut, eine Untat aus Folgerichtigkeit des Denkens" (Ibid 590). The intimate relation between 'God' and mathematical sphere-speculation makes Sloterdijk draw the conclusion that the death of God is in fact tantamount to a breakdown of metaphysical immune systems: "'Gott ist tot' - das heißt in Wahrheit: die Kugel ist tot, der Haltekreis ist gesprengt, der Immunzauber der klassischen Ontotheologie ist wirkungslos geworden (Ibid 588).

Sloterdijk's account of the 'death of God' is undeniably provocative, and highly speculative. His untamed metaphors are likely to conceal rather than elucidate his systematic points. Nonetheless, Sloterdijk draws attention to a number of paradoxical tensions within the theological systems – first and foremost the remarkable fact that the possibility of atheism was in fact a theological 'invention' engendered by the speculative fascination of infinity. To express the matter with the assistance of Blumenberg: "In the completion (*Vollendung)* of Scholasticism the potential for its destruction is already latent" (LM 336/LN 392). Hence, it was the theologians themselves that left room for hypothetically doubting the existence of God. Or to be more precise: Atheism came into being within a *theo-*

*logical* horizon of reflection since it became possible – at least as an intellectual experiment (*Gedankenexperiment*) – to think what could not have been thought before: That God does not exist (Cf. Stoellger 2003, 145). Theological absolutism namely implies a "voluntarisation and intensification (*Forcierung*) of negative language" (LM 489/LN 565), which pushes God into empty and abstract transcendence and eventually threatens to render him superfluous.

### 3.6 The Modern Age as the Second Overcoming of Gnosticism

Here the opening quote, that 'the death of God' has its historical roots in the Nominalistic idea of a *deus absconditus*, finds its evidential background. Blumenberg's contention is *not*, however, that the idea of God was put irrevocably out of mind in the late Middle Ages. Such a claim would express a one-sided and anachronistic perspective on the past. Blumenberg's real hypothesis is this: That theological speculation surrounding divine omnipotence developed a *speculative momentum* (*eine spekulative Eigendynamik*) (Stoellger 2003, 145) which ultimately made room for a human relation to the world "whose implicit content could have been formulated in the postulate that man had to behave *as though* God were dead" (LM 346/LN 404, my italics). This *hypothetical atheism* is a direct result of a theological process of autolysis which finds its point of departure in theological absolutism:

> Was wir "Maximaltheologie" nannten, macht sich selbst überflüssig und liefert zugleich das zwingende Motiv dafür, sich dieser Überflüssigkeit bewusst zu werden und von ihr Gebrauch zu machen. Das scheinbar so fromm der Größe Gottes nachfragende: *utrum deus posset*…verwandelt sich in das zunächst ebenso hypothetische: *etiam-si daretur non esse deum*… (VdN 108)

Late Medieval Nominalism – here described as a 'maximal theology' (echoing Nietzsche's idea of a 'maximal God' (*Maximal-Gotts*) introduced in *Zur Genealogie der Moral* (Cf. Nietzsche 1887, 831) which, again, refers to the early Kant (Cf. LM 613-614/LN202)) – thus motivated a hypothetical atheism which finds its

motivational background, its implicit *raison d'être*, in a "relief from the brutality of transcendence" (WM 225/AM 250) characteristic of theological absolutism. Moreover, the advancement of hypotheses becomes a means of human self-assertion, "the potential for human production of that which nature makes scarce or does not provide for man at all" (LM 199/LN 229). According to Blumenberg, the Modern Age functions as the historical reply to the theological absolutism of the late Middle Ages – understood as a situation in which the world becomes "the pure performance of reified omnipotence (…) a demonstration of the unlimited sovereignty of a will to which no questions can be addressed" (LM 171/LN 194). Human self-assertion is the answer to this doubtful situation in which God's hiddenness (*deus absconditus*) affords grounds for man's attempt to construct "for himself a counterworld of elementary rationality and manipulability" (LM 173/LN 197). Human self-assertion should not, however, be understood primarily as a biological principle:

> Thus 'self-assertion' here does not mean the naked biological and economic preservation of the human organism by means naturally available to it. It means an existential program (*Daseinsprogramm*), according to which man posits his existence in a historical situation and indicates to himself how he is going to deal with the reality surrounding him and what use he will make of the possibilities that are open to him (LM 138/LN 151)

The basic structure behind the genesis of the Modern Age can be described like this: The *theocentric* structure of theological absolutism conditions and imposes the need for an *anthropocentric* one. Where there arises the idea that God is only concerned with himself, with his own absolute power and autonomy, a new concentration on human self-interest emerges: "Indem die Theologie das absolute Interesse Gottes zu vertreten meinte, ließ sie das Interesse des Menschen an sich selbst und seine Sorge um sich selbst absolut werden, das aber heißt: die Stelle seiner theologischen Ansprechbarkeit besetzen" (OS 50). The more relentless, ruthless and unapproachable the world of God appeared to humans, the more ruthlessly they had to establish order and reliability in *their* own world.

Blumenberg illustrates this dissociation between divine transcendence and worldly immanence in the following formulation:

> God has indeed ordered the world according to measure, number and weight; but this must now be read with a possessive pronoun: according to *His* measure, according to magnitudes reserved to Him and related to His intellect alone (LM 349/LN 408)

The mobilisation of human self-assertion is the 'answer' to the voluntaristic conceptualisation of God involving a fundamental human insecurity. The late medieval doctrine of *creatio continua* as a radicalisation of the world's ultimate dependence on its divine Creator and the implied idea of the world's constant need for 'external', transitive preservation is here 're-occupied' by the idea of human self-preservation. Moreover, theorems of *intransitive* or *endogenous* preservation become dominant emblems of the Modern Age: Isaac Newton's (1643-1727) law of inertia stating that a body at rest stays at rest, or a body in motion stays in motion unless acted upon by external forces; the political philosophy of Thomas Hobbes (1588-1649) by whom the *status naturalis* (the 'pre-political' state of nature) functions as "a model of theological absolutism, which (…) is projected into the state of nature" (LM 218/LN 250) – an absolute chaos of lawlessness – which becomes the (hypothetical) starting point for the construction of political law as the only "opportunity of self-assertion" (LM 219/LN 251); and finally Baruch Spinoza's (1632-1677) idea of *conatus* (striving, inclination or effort) which constitutes a cornerstone in his metaphysics and finds its articulation in the principle of everything's striving for self-preservation (*conatus sese conservandi*): "Für Spinoza ist der Fortbestand eines gegebenen Zustandes, sein *perseverare*, das schlechthin Vorgegebene, auf das neue Faktoren einwirken müssen, um es zu verändern" (SuB 186). Blumenberg locates in all these three instances a clear mark of the rationality *par execellence* of the Modern Age:

> The Modern Age has regarded self-preservation (*conservatio sui*) as a fundamental category of everything in existence and has found this borne out all the way from the principle of inertia in physics to the

> biological structure of drives and the laws of state building (LM 143/LN 157)

Thus, the Modern Age as the epoch of self-preservation forms the historical reply to the theological absolutism which took shape in the late Middle Ages. Two things are of particular importance here: Firstly, this breakaway from theological absolutism is, according to Blumenberg, *legitimate* because it expresses an enforced overcoming of a humanly intolerable situation. As Lazier explains, there is a striking connection between legitimacy and self-assertion:

> Derived from *lex*, law, legitimacy has as its home a language of entitlement, the consciousness of which in this case arose in response to its denial (…) To assert oneself, *sich durchsetzen* resonates with *Gesetz*, law: it is to lay down the law, to order chaos, to posit oneself over and against (Lazier 2003, 633)

Human self-assertion is the historical reply to the disappearance of order in late medieval theological absolutism. Secondly, this breakaway is not unconditional. Blumenberg's model of 're-occupation' serves as the underlying figure of explanation: The issues and problems once raised cannot simply be eliminated – they exert a prolonged pressure and form a horizon of background expectations which prescribe what should, can and must be known. That is the reason why the transition from the Late Middle Ages to the Modern Age is not simply characterized by cheerful confidence in progress, but also by discouragement and resignation. Hypothetical atheism is not, however, the only answer which the Modern Age affords. In fact, one can indentify three different responses to the threat of theological absolutism: Hypothetical atheism, rational Deism and the speculative theology exemplified by Nicholas of Cusa (1401-1464) (hereafter called Cusanus).

Hypothetical atheism is characterised by an atheistic inclination in the sense that it tends to consider the world, and raise the question about human possibilities, from a position which assumes that any conclusions reached should hold 'even if there is no God' (LM 179/LN 204). God's indifference in regard to hu-

mans becomes the point of departure for a corresponding human indifference with regard to God – at least in relation to the study of nature. The exclusive self-reference of God in theological absolutism here becomes the starting point for a philosophical "Autonomieanspruch gegenüber der Theologie" (VdN 109) which treats nature in the hypothetical modus of the *as though*. Human self-assertion thus constitutes a countermove to theological absolutism in so far that it tries to retrieve the motives lost in the voluntaristic conception of God in a new, hypothetical way.

Rational Deism, which became prominent in the 17th and 18th Century, on the other hand, understands creation as an automatic clockwork marked by mechanical regularity and perfection. 'Mechanical' orientated background metaphors take the lead here: The perfect world mechanism of Deism does, Blumenberg writes, "bracket God out of the course of the world after the setting in motion of His mechanical creation, and thus becomes a defence against theological absolutism" (LM 217/LN 248). The interesting thing is that rational Deism thus forms an answer to theological absolutism by stressing the perfection of God's original creation. The metaphor of the clockwork emphasises the theologumenon of *Creation* as a kind of definitive divine self-commitment at the expense of the theologumena of theological absolutism which considers the course of the world as the unbroken result of divine creation and intervention (Cf. PM 103-108). The more the perfection of original creation is stressed, the less God needs be ascribed a function as the ruler and maintainer of the world, "denn je vollendeter die Ursetzung, um so unabhängiger und autonomer der Bestand" (HD 204). God is conceived as standing aloof from the world, as the remote "Werkmeister des Naturmechanismus" (BM 90). The Modern Age is therefore not identical with a sudden and definitive break-away from the idea of God as such, but represents a change of course in regard to theological matters.

Whereas hypothetical atheism and rational deism both can be seen as different *reactions* to theological absolutism, the theology of Cusanus forms, according to Blumenberg, a compelling alternative to this very theological absolutism. It has been argued that the speculative theology of Cusanus forms a 'paradigm' for Blumenberg's own considerations regarding the possibility of theology in the

Modern Age (Cf. Stoellger 2000, 384ff; Hundeck 2000, 180ff). In other words: Blumenberg's metaphorological re-opening of the theology of Cusanus may be said to form a paradigm for a possible alternative to theological absolutism. I shall return to this in chapter 5.4.

## 4. Curiosity

The double face of this historical transition can be elucidated by reference to a development in the understanding and evaluation of *curiosity* (*Neugierde*). My intention here is not to provide an in depth account of Blumenberg's rather detailed studies, but to focus particularly on 1) the relation between modernity and curiosity which Blumenberg tries to establish and 2) Augustine's distinction between *memoria* and *curiositas*, which is of particular relevance to the central theme of this dissertation: The memory of God.

### 4.1 The 'Naturalness' of Curiosity

In the third part of *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, Blumenberg undertakes a thorough investigation into historical developments in the concept of curiosity (*curiositas*; *Neugierde*). His basic claim is that human self-assertion is fundamentally related to an insistence on the right to theoretical curiosity; a claim that the Modern Age asserts against its medieval discrimination (AA 35).

Aristotle's famous opening words in his *Metaphysics* (Met. A, 980a, I) – stating that all men, by nature, desire to know (Πάντες ἄνθρωποι τοῦ εἰδέναι ὀρέγονται φύσει) – points to the 'naturalness' of curiosity (which, for instance, is reflected in the organic metaphorical expression 'thirst for knowledge'). The autonomous significance of theory is read "directly from man's relation to the perceptual world" (LM 255/LN 292). Joachim Ritter has called attention to the extent to which the reception of the Ancient Greek philosophy has been stamped by a foregone desire to understand it as a 'legend of emancipation' (philosophy's famous process of formation from *mythos* to *logos*) and thereby completely neglected its fundamental theological foundation. Theory is, however, not detached from theology (the word 'theory' (θεωρία) has often been

etymologically related to the Greek word for 'God' (θεός)): That is the reason why 'free theory' according to Aristotle is in its origin and meaning 'theology' (Cf. Ritter 1953, 31). This tacitly presumed convergence between happiness (εὐδαιμονία) and theory (θεωρία) involves a favouring of the *vita contemplative*[22] – to use Hannah Arendt's expression – which implies that the 'observation of the heavens' (*contemplator caeli*) becomes "exemplarischer Vollzug der Philosophie und damit die Bestimmung des Menschen" (CC 113). The central role ascribed to sight and visibility in an Ancient Greek context displays itself in the fact that many concepts pertaining to knowledge are intimately related to sight and vision (εἰδέναι, ἱστορεῖν, ἰδεῖν; 'visere', 'videre', 'specere' etc.). True knowledge is purposeless, not bound to needs. This basic idea also underlines Aristotle's understanding of freedom as freedom *from* political activity, work and other necessaries (Cf. Arendt 1958, 418f).

Blumenberg thus speaks of a 'postulate of visibility' (*Sichtbarkeitspostulat*) as the underlying model of understanding which guides the Ancient concept of reality. This postulate of visibility corresponds, Blumenberg argues, to the assumptions "of an anthropology in which man and cosmos are seen as coordinated in such a way that no essential incongruence can be assumed between man's organic equipment and the constituents of reality" (GkW 629/GdK 731). The idea of something *principally* invisible is unthinkable in an Ancient context. The postulate of visibility forms the antithesis to the theological idea that there

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[22] The Latin verb *contemplari* means 'to look at' or 'behold' and is derived from the Greek verb τέμνω meaning 'to cut', 'cut to pieces' (cf. ἄτομος: 'that cannot be cut', 'indivisble' and ἀνατομή: 'somebody who cuts, dissects') and the substantive τέμενος is a piece of land 'cut off' from common use and dedicated to a god, a holy place for contemplation (Cf. Latin *templum*). The contemplation could take place in peace and quietness in the temple, isolated from the public assembly (ἀγορά). "Der philosophische begriff lebt aus der Gleichsetzung von Himmel, Weltordnung und Tempel" (Ritter 1952, 37). The verb 'contemplari' thus denotes the special 'activity' which took place in the 'temple' where one could look closely (*considerare*) at star constellations which could be interpreted as signs and omens. 'Considerare' is related to *sidus*, star (con-stellation) (See also: Marquard 1958, 76).

could be an inaccessible space reserved to God only and that human knowledge therefore is in fact only scraping the phenomenal surface of reality. This (theologically motivated) idea would simply compromise the tacitly accepted presumption of a basic convergence between 'knowledge' and 'visibility' (Cf. FOV 15-17). That this may be difficult to comprehend from a modern perspective bears witness to the fact that 'world' is not simply an invariable 'constant' (LM 8/LN 17) and, therefore, that the imposition of an unquestioned modern self-understanding is likely to block what Blumenberg has referred to as the past's 'demand for remembrance' (*Anspruch auf Erinnerung*): Not to let the self-affirmation (*Selbtbestätigung*) or interests of a given presence define the understanding, relevance or importance ascribed to the past (EC 168). That this is a difficult task follows from the mere fact that *our* expectations do not simply cover the expectations of a given past and that *our* questions, unpronounced presupposition and concepts are often anonymously projected on to the sources that we confront (Cf. Koyré 1943, 272).

When in 1676 the Danish astronomer Olav Rømer (1644-1710) discovered that light does not propagate with an infinite speed but 'hesitates' (*le retardement de la lumiere*), he simultaneous brought human reason into disrepute. Light, which up until then had served as a prominent metaphor for truth, lost its persuasive metaphorical power as *infinite*, and humans were now to realise that the world constitutes an 'inert' and 'reluctant' medium for the dissemination of human reason. "Apparently", Blumenberg writes, "nature itself had set bounds to human access to reality" (LW 182-183). With the astronomical discoveries in the 16th and 17th Century, a process was initiated which Kant later described as man's insight into the "abyss of ignorance" (*den Abgrund der Unwissenheit*) (Kant 1787, 517 (B 603)). Here, at the very latest, a possible re-occupation of the medieval idea of an invisible, divine sphere beyond human reason found its possible scientific parallel. Here, the very contrast to the Ancient postulate of visibility is found since the time of the world alone barricades any claim to penetrate into the intentions of creation:

> Man could no longer be the designated witness of the wonders of the creation if the time required for light to reach him from unknown stars and star systems was longer than the entire duration of the world (GkW 632/GdW 734)

Kant's "unforgettable comment" (DLT 110) about astronomy's disclosure of an 'abyss of ignorance' is not to be understood as a regrettable defect in relation to human reason. Quite the opposite: Just like the person born blind doesn't have any idea about darkness, the ignorant (*der Unwissende*) does not have any idea about 'science' (*Wissenchaft*). And yet the insight into one's ignorance forms the starting point for a thorough change in the designation of the ends of our use of reason (*in der Bestimmung der Endabsichten unseres Vernunftgebrauch*) (Kant 1787, 517 (B603)). In *this* regard, modern astronomy has functioned as an unrivalled vehicle for the articulation of an important dialectical insight into the limits of human reason which I think may be expressed as follows: Worse than ignorance is the ignorance of one's ignorance. Here, the Kantian appeal to reason's critical[23] 'self-enlightenment' seems to find its astronomical model of orientation: It is in realising what we *cannot* know that we find the key to a new evaluation of human knowledge; an evaluation which must take into account the "narrowness (*Beschränktheit*) of man's power of theoretical comprehension (*Fassungskraft*)" (GkW 588/GdW 683-684).

In this historical process a peculiar antinomy comes to light which Blumenberg relates to the abovementioned 'postulate of visibility': When Galileo in 1609 raised his telescope to the heavens and discovered that the moon was not, as had been the unshaken presumption until then, a perfectly ideal sphere but – like the earth – was hilly and had craters, he not only called into question a thousand years old metaphysical presumption about the fundamental difference

[23] 'Critical' does not simply mean to give notice to faults and imperfections, but also – as the Greek root of the word κρίνειν/κριτική indicates – 'to distinguish', 'to discern', 'to judge', 'to decide'. Kant's main ambition was to *distinguish* between what lies 'within' the (theoretical) reach of human knowledge and what falls 'outside' it. In this effort to distinguish he 'criticises' a *particular* form of metaphysics. Both these meanings of the word are at play in the (double genitive) title of his legendary work.

between the *sublunary* and the *superlunary* sphere of the universe. He also called into doubt the unquestionable 'claim to definitiveness' (*Endgültigkeitsanspruch*) which had traditionally been attached to the visibility of heaven. In making what had until then been invisible to the naked eye visible by means of his telescope, Galileo also rendered visible another metaphysical insight: That the visible can only be ascribed a provisory, time-limited truth value since nothing prevents us from finding new evidence in the future that likewise threatens to undermine what we thought we knew. Blumenberg sums up this peculiar antinomy with the following words:

> In Galileis Griff nach dem Teleskop steckt eine Antinomie. Indem er das Unsichtbare sichtbar macht und so der kopernikanischen Überzeugung Evidenz verschaffen zu können glaubt, liefert er sich dem Risiko der Sichtbarkeit als der letzen Instanz der Wahrheit aus; indem er aber das Fernrohr in Dienst nimmt, um solche Sichtbarkeit herzustellen, bricht er zugleich mit dem Sichtbarkeitspostulat der astronomischen Tradition und gibt dem unbezwinglichen Verdacht Raum, dass die technisch je vermittelte Sichtbarkeit, so weit sie auch vorangetrieben werden mag, ein zufälliges, an dem Gegenstand fremde Bedingungen gebundenes Faktum ist (FOV 21)

When Galileo acquainted himself with the true nature of the moon, revealed to him through his telescope, he also made a peculiarly modern discovery: The impossibility of reaching conclusive findings based on observation. Galileo had discovered the unfinished, provisory and necessarily arbitrary character of technically mediated visibility.

**4.2 "In interiore homine habitat veritas…"**

Curiosity (*curiositas*) was introduced by Augustine as a polemic concept used against the pagan philosophy of Antiquity. Under the heading "Curiosity is enrolled in the catalogue of vices" (LM 309-323/LN 358-377), Blumenberg describes how Augustine plays a key role in the Christian evaluation of curiosity. In his book *The Sources of the Self. The Making of the Modern Identity* (1989), Charles Taylor argues that it was Augustine "who introduced the inwardness of radical reflexivity" and who made "the step to inwardness (…) because it is a step towards

God" (Taylor 1989, 131; 132). Taylor quotes Augustine's famous words from *De vera Religione* (39, 72): "Noli foras ire, in teipsum redi; in interiore homine habitat veritas" (Cf. Taylor 1989, 129). Ricoeur seems to share this evaluation when he discusses Augustine as the first representative of what he calls 'the tradition of inwardness' (*la tradition du regard interieur*). Truth is not 'outside' but 'inside'; it resides in the 'spacious palaces of memory', to use Augustine's renowned metaphor in book X of his *Confessiones* (Cf. Ricoeur 2000, 98/118).

The interesting thing here is that Augustine's 'step to inwardness' – which is a 'turn to memory' (*memoria*) – is carried out by a discrimination of curiosity (*curiositas*). Moreover, only by means of memory do we find an authentic relation to our true origin. As Blumenberg explains,

> *Memoria* and *curiositas* relate to one another like inwardness and outwardness, not, however, as alternative 'modes of behaviour', but rather in such a way that memory as actualization of one's essence is suppressed only by the forcefulness of the world's influence upon one and can assert itself to the extent that this 'overstimulation' (*Reizüberflutung*) can be warded off and dammed up. The soul is inwardness, as soon as and insofar as it is no longer outwardness; it is *memoria,* in so far as it does not lose itself in *curiositas* (LM 315/LN 366)

In this context, Augustine's firm distinction between *uti* ('use') and *frui* ('enjoyment') plays a key role. These two terms are in themselves neutral. The decisive thing is that one should not make use of what should really be enjoyed (namely God), or enjoy what should really be made use of (namely the world). In other words: It is unproblematic to make use of this world if it takes place with a purpose of salvation (*ad salutem*). If, on the other hand, one enjoys the world as such one becomes the victim of deceitful desire. When Augustine classifies curiosity as part of the 'ocular desire' (*concupiscentia oculorum*), it has to do with the fact that humans - if they inquisitively explore the immediate world around them - are guilty of a treacherous self-admiration and thus *forget* what is really important: God. In this way memory and curiosity are played out against each other.

In order for man to be liberated from his prison of self-centeredness he has to turn his attention *away from* and *reach beyond* the immediately given. Augustine thus requires that one renounces "the curiosity that turns *outward* and instead direct one's spiritual attentiveness *inward*" (LM 433/LN 508).

According to Augustine God has donated the world to human beings as a merciful act of grace. The existence of the world is a transcendent act of God's pure grace. The world is not, however, intended for enjoyment but for salvation. This has the underlying implication that curiosity eventually is related to the problem of *time*: In the economy of salvation (*Heilsökonomie*) curiosity shows itself as a fatal waste of time since it hinders human attention from being concentrated on the vital: Obtaining salvation. Moreover, Augustine's incrimination of curiosity is connected to an overall idea of the economy of time and a distinction between what is essentially worth knowing and what is purely accidental, a matter of indifference.

> In the boundlessness of his cognitive will (*in der Schrankenlosigkeit des Erkenntniswillens*), man denies his finitude precisely in his dealings with time by behaving as though he does not need to apply any measure or to bring forward any justification here (LM 317/LN 369)

To lose oneself in the matters of this world, 'to count the stars and the grains of sand' (*numerunt stellas et harenam et dimetiantur sidereas plagas*), as Augustine writes in book V (3.3) of his *Confessiones*, involves a "betrayal of transcendence" (*Transzendenzverrat*) (Safranski 1997, 57). Humans do not need to know more about the world than is strictly necessary for their salvation, and ultimately there is nothing relevant to salvation in the 'book of nature' which cannot be found in 'the Book of books'. The outwardness of curiosity compromises the fundamental concern for salvation, since it activates a "godless state of being fallen into the power of the world" (*heilosen Weltverfallenheit*) (LM 314/LN 365), a fatal forgetting of the substantial. If the main question of the *Confessiones* is: 'Where do I find you, God?' the main answer is: In memory (Tell 2006, 233). *Memoria* thus forms the opposition to *curiositas*. God abides within memory (*in*

*memoriam mea*); he resides in the deep corridors of human memory. It is through the inwardness of memory that humans find a way back to their transcendent origin: "The soul's legitimate path is not the arrogant flight to the stars but rather the humble descent into oneself and the resulting ascent to God" (LM 316/LN 367).

In book 10 of his *Confessiones*, Augustine portrays memory as a "great field or a spacious palace, a storehouse for countless images of all kinds" (*Confes.* X, 8.12). Augustine celebrates memory as a great power (*magna vis*) which is vast and infinite; he speaks about memories stored as things which are not yet "swallowed up and buried in forgetfulness" (*quod nondum absorbuit et sepelevit oblivio*) (X, 8.10). Augustine touches on a number of apparent paradoxes related to 'remembering the forgotten'. Where do we look for something that we have lost if not in memory (*ubi tandem quaremus nisi in ipsa memoria*)? (X, 19.28) But had we really forgotten something completely "we would not even be able to look for what was lost" (*nec amissum quaerere poterimus, quod omnino obliti fuerimus*). As Ricoeur states: The danger of forgetting continues to haunt Augustine's praise of memory (Ricoeur 2000, 100/119). Augustine understands forgetfulness as a lack of memory (*privatio memoriae*). That is the reason why Augustine encourages a 'memory of forgetfulness'. But what, then, about the radical forgetfulness, the total absence of memory? Here Augustine plays out different models but ends up with an argument which echoes the old tradition of eristic (Ricoeur 2000, 100/120):

> Yet, however it may be, and in whatever inexplicable and incomprehensible way it happens, I am certain that I remember forgetfulness, even though forgetfulness obliterates all that we remember (*Conf.* X, 16.25)

With these words Augustine continues his search for God. In order to find God he must, however, pass beyond memory, he must transcend the power which is called memory (*transibo et hanc vim meam, queae memoria vocatur*) (X, 17.26) in order to reach God. Even though the force of memory indicates the path to God, Augustine constantly expresses his doubt, his uncertainty about the danger of forgetfulness: How am I to find you if I have no memory of you? (*quomodo iam*

*inveniam te, si memor non sum tui?*) (Ibid). "Here", Ricoeur remarks, "we catch a glimpse of a forgetfulness even more fundamental than the destruction of all visible things by time, the forgetfulness of God" (Ricoeur 2000, 100/121).

Augustine – who had a background in the Manichean rejection of the true God – knew very well of the dangers of forgetfulness. He is troubled by the thought that his own previous oblivion of God (*oblivio Dei* as genitivus objectivus) may perhaps correspond to God's oblivion of him (*oblivio Dei* as genitivus subjectivus). The idea that sinfulness is intimately related to forgetfulness reflects, Blumenberg argues, a Gnostic mode of thought. Thus, there is a Gnostic frame of reference in the idea that the *forgetting* of the true origin and destiny of the human soul (πνεῦμα) is what constitutes *sin*. Moreover, the idea that the awakening from forgetfulness already *is* deliverance (*Erlösung*) also seems to suggest a Gnostic notion:

> The salutary knowledge (*die Heilbringende Erkenntnis*) is not received from outside as a revelatory 'teaching' but rather is 'set free' (*'freigegeben'*) as self-consciousness as soon as the 'call' to remembrance is heard (LM 632/LN 366)

There are, in other words, obvious Gnostic presuppositions in Augustine's evaluation of curiosity and memory. Not only does the distinction between curiosity and memory (between seeking God 'within' and seeking him 'outside' in the world) seem to contain an ineradicable *dualism* (Cf. AA 49); also the understanding of forgetfulness as a "concealment and overlaying of memory (…) by envelopment in worldly things" (LM 315/LN365-366) points to a basic Gnostic pattern of thought.

Does Augustine's 'memory of God' not constitute a satisfying theological answer to the questions raised in this dissertation? Is not Augustine's God, who dwells within, an alluring 'answer' to the question: Where do we find God if not 'in' the world? Although Augustine undeniably acquires his understanding of God through (a certain concept of) memory, he is far from drawing the same conclusions that my idea about the *plasticity of memory* seems to entail. The ques-

tion can, I think, be translated thus: Which God is it that Augustine remembers? Augustine repeatedly stresses that his God is unchangeable. To Augustine the unchangeableness of God seems to constitute one of his most important attributes. He thus states that in God there is "no change or shadow of variation" (*in te non est transmutatio nec momenti obumbratio*) (*Conf.* IV, 15.25), that God is "permanent" (*permanentem deum*) and that God is he who is "the selfsame and does not change" (*Et tu es 'id ipsum' valde, qui non mutaris*) (IX, 4.11). The point here is that Augustine cannot allow his memory *of* God to somehow subject God himself to change. Were God to be subjected to (human) memory it would impugn his unchangeableness: He would become subject to alteration. Thus, the basic idea suggested in this dissertation – to interpret memory as a plastic power which may transform the remembered – seems to collide with one of the essential divine attributes in Augustine's theology: God's unchangeability. Dave Tell has formulated the matter thus:

> The sheer facticity of Augustine's divine recollection assures him that God "abide[s] within" memory (…) Yet the memory by which divinity is called to mind must not proceed *ex locis* (from places), for Augustine refuses to subject God to what I have called the politics of placement – the changing, the positioning, and managing of the remembered object (…) (Tell 2006, 233)

Even though the idea of *memoria ex locis* has an Augustinian background, Augustine cannot allow his God to be 'placed' or 'located'. The understanding of memory as a 'place' or an "inner chamber, vast and unbound" (*penetrale amplum et infinitum*) (X, 8.15) in which images can be placed and stored, would potentially imply that God was made the victim of *human* memory. It would – at least potentially – compromise the fundamental unchangeability of God. Augustine's dilemma thus seems to be: "God must be remembered but he cannot be placed, the *memoria Dei* requires a memorial practice in which the past is not preserved through placement in memory" (Tell 2006, 234). That Augustine is unable to find a 'place for God' means that the traditional idea of 'memory from places', which characterises the so-called mnemotechnic tradition, is in fact inadequate for re-

membering God. The spatial metaphors applied to memory in this tradition are insufficient, and potentially subversive, when applied to God. There can be no place for God. Tell's proposed solution to this Augustinian dilemma (that God must somehow be found in the immense corridors of memory and yet cannot be located anywhere 'within' memory) is to consider the *rethorical practice of confession* the pivotal *ars memoria* for remembering God. Confession thus forms the "rhetorical and memorial practice through which Augustine remembers God without placing God (…) for confession provides him [Augustine, UHR] with a memorial practice that does not proceed *ex locis*" (Tell 2006, 249). Tell provides an excellent illustration of how we, according to Augustine, remember *through* language, i.e. through inner words (*verbum mentis*) which thereby form the condition of remembering God; and yet these inner words are inadequate, insufficient and do not provide unmediated access to the cloisters of memory. The inner words do not provide us with transparent or definitive access to memory. As Tell explains:

> In the language of contemporary phenomenology, the *verbum mentis* is a translucent medium and it is this very translucency – as against transparency – that enables God to be found in Memory. The translucency of the *verbum mentis* assures it will be phenomenally experienced as a medium and not mistaken for that of which it is an image (Tell 2006, 246)

Tell's considerations are promising for several reasons: First of all for insisting that (Augustine's) 'memory of God' is in fact a *work of memory* which means: An endless quest that can never be finished. Secondly, for showing that the memory of God does not exist in the disclosure of images hidden away in memory, but is inextricably bound up with 'rhetorics'. This idea corresponds with the claim made in this dissertation drawing on Blumenberg: God is an absolute metaphor; as an absolute metaphor God is not an object of experience but rather 'a rhetorical act' out of which *possible* understandings of God are fed.

Even though Augustine provides an interesting point of departure for formulating an idea about the memory of God, it nonetheless seems clear that the

metaphysical conditions under which Augustine made his theological assumptions are somehow 'untranslatable' for the modern reader (Blumenberg speaks, in another context, about the 'non-repeatability' (*Nichtwiederherstellbarkeit*) of historical conditions (Cf. EmS 90)): Our problems are not simply *identical* to Augustine's. Despite the subtleness of Augustine's speculations he operates with an (Neo-Platonic) idea of transcendence according to which God must be conceived as unchangeable and infinitely perfect. This basic 'dogmatic' assumption collides with the idea of God's changeability as a result of the plasticity of memory and Blumenberg's general idea about God's imperfection set forth in *Matthäuspassion*. Moreover, the concept of transcendence (which in Augustine is above all derived from Neo-Platonic resources) has as one of its primary assertions that transcendence must somehow be located 'outside' or 'apart' from the world; also Augustine thus seems to trace his conception of transcendence back to "a *spatial* schema" (Cf. LM 486/LN 561) and thus operates with a difference between what is of the cosmos and what is not. He thereby subscribes to a kind of 'spatial-vertical' conception of transcendence *despite* his 'turn to inwardness'. Augustine's idea that God is remembered 'rhetorically' and somehow withdraws himself from the fixation of human memory may gesture towards an interesting model of reflection which is perhaps not, after all, that far from Blumenberg's understanding of God as an absolute metaphor.

### 4.3 The Re-evaluation of Curiosity

As we have already seen, Blumenberg's claim is that Augustine does not overcome the Gnostic challenge but simply transposes it *ad hominen*. Following this train of thought Marquard has argued that the Augustinian discrimination of curiosity holds a Gnostic feature, because it includes a negative evaluation of the world-interest: "Das Neugierverbot war (...) die Fortsetzung der gnostischen Weltnegation durch Negation der Welterkenntnis" (Marquard 1984, 78). That would then imply that the *positive* re-evaluation of curiosity in the Modern Age

could be conceived as an overcoming of a Gnostic motive contained in Augustine's theologically sanctioned refusal of the right of curiosity. The liberation of curiosity from the catalogue of vices thereby becomes a central component in the unfolding of human self-assertion. In order to become, in the famous words of Descartes, 'masters and possessors of nature' (*maîtres et possesseurs de la nature*) (Descartes 1637, 634), the scientific frame of mind must first promote curiosity to the rank of virtue. That this rehabilitation of curiosity constitutes an overcoming of the Gnostic elements contained in Augustine's separation between 'inner' and 'outer', *memoria* and *curiositas*, seems obvious. There is, however, a rather more subtle dimension to this rehabilitation of curiosity which has been pointed out by Manfred Sommer. Sommer points to the 'antagonism' between self-preservation and curiosity: The rehabilitation of curiosity namely constitutes a double-edged affair in so far that the boundless curiosity *a limine* tends towards the destruction of the rationality of self-preservation. Boundless curiosity, the unrestricted absorption in the 'outer' phenomena thus tends to lose the rationality of self-preservation in dispersion and ex-centric overstimulation. That is the reason why the rehabilitation of curiosity cannot be identical with its total and unreserved liberation but has to mean its 'rationalisation', its "Rückbindung (…) an die Selbsterhaltung" (Sommer 1987, 363). Gnosis is, in other words, latently present in the Modern Age:

> Mit dieser Legitimation und Adoption der *curiositas* trägt die von cartesianischem Geist beseelte neuzeitliche Wissenschaft die Möglichkeit ihrer Selbstzerstörung in sich. Gerade das, was sie antreibt, ihr Motor, ist selbst das, wodurch sie mit 'Zerstreuung' bedroht ist (Sommer 1987, 363)

Blumenberg locates what he calls a "new seriousness imposed on man by the late-medieval situation" (LM 183/LN 206-207) which accompanies the dissolution of the Medieval concept of truth. The Aristotelian and Scholastic ideal of science – the convergence of 'theory' and human 'happiness' or the ideal of "contemplating the world from the divine point of view and ultimately sharing

God's happiness" (LM 200/229-230) – was replaced by the 'artificial' character of nominalistic hypotheses. What was traditionally ascribed only to astronomy – namely its special status as a purely calculatory 'technique' (*ars*) and not as a true science about the essence of things (*scientia*) – is generalized by Nominalism for all knowledge. In the light of the traditional concept of truth the Nominalistic conception involves (perhaps surprisingly, from a modern point of view) a *reduction* of the expectations with respect to the study of nature. If science can no longer be identical with a right of access to the intentions of divine creation, it may at least serve as a technical instrument by which humans can secure themselves a certain amount of order and predictability *despite* the barriers raised by theological absolutism. Whereas late medieval Nominalism has often been interpreted as a new, matter-of-fact orientated approach to nature, which foreshadows the so-called Scientific Revolution in the 16th and 17th Century, Blumenberg stresses the ambivalence in this tradition and its influence on wider intellectual history. On the one hand, Nominalism laid the groundwork for a scientifically fruitful and theologically liberated approach to nature. On the other hand, science could no longer claim to penetrate the mind of God, but had to restrict itself to "explaining the phenomena by means of hypotheses and to give up the ideal of precise adequacy in its concepts and standards of measurement" (LM 347/LN 405-406). Nominalistic science had to recognise its theological irrelevance and impotence in affairs transcending the sphere of human experience. The relationship between theology and the rise of a science has been given characteristically concise expression by Nietzsche: "Science comes…into being…when the gods are not well conceived" (Nietzsche 1875, 333)[24]. Blumenberg puts it differently: "Science arises when man must give up

[24] Robert Wallace has – somewhat misleadingly, I think – translated this as: "Science comes into being when the gods are not *thought of as* good" (Cf. LM 202, my italics). In the German text, however, Nietzsche does not use the word *gut* as an adjective in order to characterise the gods (as either 'good' or 'bad'), but adverbially with regard to the way in which humans conceive God. In the original text Nietzsche writes: "Wissenschaft (NB. *bevor* sie Gewohnheit und Instinkt ist) entsteht wenn die Götter nicht gut gedacht werden" (Cf. LN 233). Wallace's translation is nonetheless understandably motivated by the *thematic* con-

wanting what is necessary for his mere existence to be sufficient to make him happy" (LM 203/LN 233). The dissociation between happiness and theory eventually was the outcome of a theologically motivated change in the concept of truth, dislocating the focus on divine reason to divine will.[25] A change, however, that not only implied a 'liberation' *from* theology, but also involved a renunciation *of* the basic medieval idea that the individual can embrace and unfold the "amplitude of truth" (*fülle der Wahrheit*) (Cf. UK 135).

Nominalism was, in other words, not simply a decisive step in regaining order; in regaining – albeit in a new way – the stability and regularity, which could no longer be guaranteed theologically. It also expressed a reduction of expectations, a diminution of the claim to truth. That is the reason why Blumenberg in this dissociation of truth and happiness also finds a theologically motivated lack of courage (*Mutlosigkeit*) (LM 348/LN 407) and restless apathy (*acedia*). Rather than being the manifestation of a new, self-confident and critical eradication of illusions in the approach to nature the late medieval loss of cosmos (*Kosmosverlust*) expressed a "postulate of caution" (*Postulat der Vorsicht*) (LM 214/LN 245) and conveyed a theoretical postulate of humility (*theoretische Bescheidenheitspostulat*) (LM 236/LN 235). In *Jenseits von Gut und Böse* Nietzsche spoke about Christianity's long bondage of the spirit and its mistrustful constraint of thoughts as means by which (*als das Mittel*) the European spirit's (*Geist*) strength and 'ruthless curiosity' (*rücksichtlose Neugierde*) was ignited (Nietzsche 1885, 646). But the ruthless curiosity, which unfolded itself in the Renaissance and early Modern Age, may also, as Blumenberg here observes, be induced by an anxiety that something had fallen way:

> Die Ungewissheit der Konstanz und Verlässlichkeit der Natur kommen in der ängstlichen Neugierde zum Ausdruck mit der an der Grenze von Mittelalter und Neuzeit nach den Belegen der eideti-

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nection between the rise of science and the problem of theodicy, which underlies Blumenberg general attempt to re-think the genesis of the Modern Age.

[25] This change has been humorously described by Odo Marquard: "Der Kopf optiert fürs Profane, wenn dem Menschen theologisch zugemutet wird, vor Gott den Kopf abzunehmen" (Marquard 1958, 82-83).

> schen Unordnung in der Natur gesucht wird; die Kuriositätenkabinette der Zeit bestätigen anschaulich die angstbereite Ahnung der Nichtexistenz von *causa formales* (OS 46)

What is often recognised as the most crucial thing in regard to the process of becoming scientific – namely the mathematization of the experimental sciences – may well have implied that "Aristotelian physics" was sent "into retirement" (LM 361/LN 422), as Robert Wallace brilliantly renders the thought into English. It thus involved a "disappearance of inherent purposes" (*Telosschwund*) (LM 147/LN 161) which had been the very core of Aristotelian physics[26]. But it also – and this is Blumenberg's basic claim – involved a reduction of expectations with regard to the truth claims traditionally associated with 'theory'. Blumenberg's core hypothesis here is, that "(…) man under the conditions of theological absolutism had to live with 'less truth' that the Ancient world and High Scholasticism had intended for him (…)" (LM 202/LN 233). Even though the theologically motivated disappearance of order and certainty inaugurated a thorough rehabilitation of human *curiosity*, it also carried an undercurrent index of disappointment and loss. The liberation of curiosity as a new outwards looking attitude to the world may also have been accompanied by 'the melancholy of the inaccessibility of the inner glory of divinity' (*die Melancholie über die Unerreichbarkeit der inneren Herrlichkeiten der Gottheit*) (AA 70).

Albrecht Dürer's (1471-1528) enigmatic masterpiece, *Melancholia I* (1514), reflects this atmosphere of loss in the very eye of the many technical instruments and advanced tools constructed by man. While human domination over nature is increased by means of all sorts of technical devices, the divine light slowly fades away. The feeling that truth may itself be gloomy (*triste*) (Ricoeur 2000, 76/92) and that humans are no longer capable of extending their reason beyond the limits of the sheer phenomenal surface of reality, seems to enclose Dürer's

[26] Aristotle's term ἐντελέχεια is probably derived from ἐν ('in') + τέλος ('purpose', 'end') + ἔχειν ('to have') thus meaning something like 'having its purpose or end in itself or within'. The exact etymology is, however, disputed (Cf. the entry on 'Entelechie' in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, Bd. 2, 506ff).

*Melancholia* within a dark aura. Blumenberg sees in the medieval idea of *acedia* a moment of unarticulated resignation: A theological and metaphysical discouragement with respect to the "God who withdraws in his sovereign arbitrariness as *deus absconditus*" (LM 336/LN 391). Blumenberg's claim that the Modern Age involves a *neutralisation of eschatology* has to be understood against this background. Human self-assertion and the liberation of curiosity presuppose a new concept of nature: A concept which is formulated against the idea of the world as an 'episode':

> Dependability, rational constancy, regularity are characteristics of a concept of nature that does not want to admit the world as a metaphysical episode stretched between beginning and end, between creation and destruction (LM 323/LN376)

The Janus face of modern science we touched on previously may now be expressed like this: On the one hand, science and technology has functioned as incomparably successful instruments of human self-assertion in the re-gaining of *order* and stability in a world which had lost its transparency and predictability as the result of theological absolutism. On the other hand, science and technology has at the same time revealed nature as an indifferent dessert of insignificance with respect to the anthropocentric and teleological interests which man had traditionally invested in the concept of nature. This double face of the Modern Age has to do with the inner logic of the connection between 'self-assertion' and disappearance of order which finds its perhaps most dramatic expression in Nietzsche. To Nietzsche the belief in a pre-given, teleological order has been made obsolete by the rise of modern science; but that does *not* imply, according to Nietzsche, that it has taken leave of it's last, hard-to-recognize dogmatic belief: "that if not reality itself, then at least the truth about it must be useful and beneficial to man" (LM 140/LN 153). Even though modern natural science did develop as part of a critique of the principle of anthropocentric teleology in nature, this does not, as Blumenberg explains, "exclude the possibility that in regard to human relevance of truth that it presupposes (…) it has held fast to the

teleological premise" (LM 140/LN 153). It thereby exposes a Christian-metaphysical residue.

### 4.4 Cusanus and an Alternative Modernity?

As we have seen, the Modern Age constitutes itself as an overcoming of theological absolutism and its inherent Gnostic features. Against this background of unbearable human insecurity the Modern Age mobilises its self-assertive impulse. Seen in this light, the Modern Age appears as a justifiable reaction against its medieval background. This is not, however, Blumenberg's last word about the relationship between the Modern Age and Christian-Medieval theology. There is a fairly strong presumption that, in Cusanus, Blumenberg finds an *alternative* theological position which the Modern Age *could have* identified with. Here, the 'imaginative' character of Blumenberg's work of memory comes into view: Cusanus's theology constitutes, in a sense, the counterpart to the theological absolutism of late medieval Nominalism and thus emerges as a remarkable alternative which does not involve the antagonistic contradiction between theological absolutism and human self-assertion. In a 1957 publication under the heading *Die Kunst der Vermutung* (The Art of Conjecture), Blumenberg published, and provided commentary on, a number of Cusanus's texts; and some of the latter's ideas are remarkably close to Blumenberg's own basic metaphorological notions. Cusanus's idea of an *ars coniecturalis* (the art of conjecture), his idea of *contractio* (contraction) and his basic idea of 'imprecision' (*Ungenauigkeit*) helped to inform Blumenberg's own memorial-imaginative variations of the death of God. According to Blumenberg, Cusanus's notion about the fundamental imprecision of any description forms the "most fruitful idea in Cusanus" (CU 13). The background for Blumenberg's evaluation of Cusanus as a 'third alternative' can be found in the following passage:

> In the formulation of ontological "imprecision" (*Ungenaugigkeit*) as the essence of "knowing ignorance" (*Wissende Unwissenheit*), the Cusan seems to be able once again to force together the tendencies of

> the late Middle Ages that press toward divergence (LM 356-357/LN 416)

Cusanus stands in a remarkable relation to the Middle Ages. On the one hand, his thinking is animated by a fundamental (albeit more or less unspoken) "concern for the continuance" (*Sorge um den Bestand*) of the Middle Ages (LM 483/LN 558). On the other hand, his thinking is shot through with thought motifs which are remarkably remote from the Scholastic systems. Blumenberg stresses first of all Cusanus's *realism* in his view of concepts as possessing something essential. Although Cusanus advocates a conceptual realism through which humans can attain real insight into reality, it does not entail that human understanding of reality is complete and definitive. Rather, knowledge is always constitutively approximate. Thus, inaccuracy or imprecision forms a basic "metaphysical axiom" (CU 19) in Cusanus's thinking. The idea that any description is fundamentally unfinished need not, however, be a recipe for human restlessness and perpetual ignorance. Rather, imprecision is an *ambivalent* metaphysical postulate. It may imply a regrettable resignation regarding judgemental inconclusiveness; but it may also form the starting point for an "attentiveness and energy directed at experience" (LM 505/LN 584). To Cusanus, imprecision signals the latter; it is the imprecision of human knowledge which forms the background for an active, ceaseless exploration of the world. Cusanus, therefore, did not recognise the theologically sanctioned prohibition of curiosity introduced by Augustine:

> There is no longer any need to put a taboo on theoretical curiosity, or to put moral restrictions on it, because the process of theory itself continually destroys the illusion of its finite realizability (LM 358-359/LN 420)

Since all knowledge is always given perspectively and as such is incomplete, it forces humans to take nature itself into examination: To explore, to calculate, to weigh and to measure. To take nature into closer inspection can therefore be claimed to be a direct consequence of the constitutive absence of infinite preci-

sion, which characterises the human situation in the world. Precisely by *resigning* from the claim of absolute accuracy it becomes possible for human beings to *gain* insight into secrets of Creation. The Cusan 'art of conjecture' thus seems to imply an opening up of the rigid limitations of Scholasticism, "die Erkundung neuer Regionen und "Jagdreviere" – eine cusanische Lieblingsmetapher – des Geistes" (CU 17; Cf. LM 498/LN 576).

According to Blumenberg, the theological consequences of the idea of humans being created in the image of God was never thoroughly thought through, neither by patristic minds, nor by Scholasticism. *Had* it been so, it would have been impossible to neglect "wie unabdingbar genau eben diese Formel das christliche Denken verpflichtete" and how the 'augmentation' (*Steigerung*) of God therefore would have implied a corresponding 'augmentation' of human dignity (*Wesenerfüllung*) (CU 40). As Blumenberg notes, this idea of man's secrete relationship with God *could* have become a fundamental formula for a theology in which human autonomy was conceived as a divine mission:

> Es hätte daraus, historisch wirklich ernst genommen, eine Theologie der Neuzeit werden können, eine Theologie, die den Menschen ‚für voll' genommen hätte, weil sie von der Überzeugung durchdrungen gewesen wäre, dass Gott ihn ‚für voll' nimmt (…) der Mensch ist groß, *weil* Gott groß ist (CU 46; 47)

Despite the reality of this *possibility*, Cusanus remained an isolated thinker, historically. But it belongs to Blumenberg's metaphorological method of work to also thematise that which cannot simply be claimed as factual from a modern vantage point. Which possibilities was it, then, that remained unfolded in Cusanus's thinking and which may be claimed to lie behind some of Blumenberg's own reflections on God? The answer to this question seems to be: By formulating a *positive* idea of both *infinity* and *imprecision* which find their theological background and legitimacy in the idea that man was created in God's image. This very idea thus forms the theological background for the valorising of infinity and imprecision. Whereas the medieval tradition had thought its three com-

ponents of reality – God, universe, and humans – as "set above one another in a threestoried structure" (LM 484/LN 558) the elementary Cusan figure of thought seems to be that theology, cosmology and anthropology are closely tied together and mutually dependent. It is not a system of hierarchic order but a correlated system of interconnectedness:

> For man, according to the Cusan's picture, there emerges as a result two dimensions in which the truth can be pursued into the infinite: on the one hand, the imprecision in principle of any given whatsoever, and with it the inexhaustible potential of the theoretical comprehension of each object; and on the other hand, infinity as the never-to-be-overcome indefiniteness of the universe of empirical knowledge, the imprecision of the universe itself (LM 518/LN 600)

Crucial in this context is that Cusanus's anthropology is a direct consequence of his speculative theology. Since God has created humans in his own image (*imago Dei*) humans possess freedom *to* the world. The theological justification of the "the idea of creative man" (Cf. NdN 9-46) are qualified in Cusanus through a *positive* concept of freedom, which expresses the decisive correlation between man and God (Cf. CU 44ff). Cusanus thus breaks with the index of *negativity* traditionally attached to the concept of freedom. Moreover, his positively construed concept of freedom finds its theological legitimacy in a break with the influential metaphysical doctrine of 'art imitating nature' (*ars imitator naturam*), which goes back to Aristotle's *Physics* (Cf. *Phys.* 194 a). 'Art' (*ars*) should not, of course, be taken in the peculiar modern understanding of the word (suggesting the collection of works of art which can be found in museums and exhibitions) but rather refers to the *total generative capability or creative power* of humans (the Greek word τέχνη, from which the Latin *ars* is derived, embraces both 'technical' skills and the craft of the 'artist'). Thus, the doctrine of imitation forms a highly influential answer to the question: What are limits and scopes of human creativity? Human creation basically was the infinite repetition of what was already there; nothing genuinely new could be added. This may be quite difficult to realise from a modern perspective where the idea of human creation and

original invention has become so patently obvious a part of our self-understanding that it resides anonymously under the threshold of our self-consciousness. But historical reflection also means, as Blumenberg argues, to see "what has become self-evident as something that was not originally self-evident" (LM 594/LN 698) thereby also making the 'obviousness of the present' less obvious. If the doctrine of imitation had constituted the main metaphysical framework in Antiquity and the Middle Ages (Cf. NdN), Cusa's concept of freedom represents a remarkable break with the basic assumption that human creativity is restricted to imitation: "Eine neu Konzeption des Menschen, die ihn zum 'Partner' Gottes machen konnte, erforderte das Zerbrechen des Rahmens" (KuR 285).

In the dialogue *Idiota de mente* from 1450, one can observe how a number of theological ideas offer grounds for the articulation of a new human self-understanding. The dialogue's 'layman' (*idiota*) is the maker of kitchen utensils. But, he remarks, he has not produced his pots and ladles by imitating the patterns of nature but rather by imitating God's *ars infinita* (NdN 13). Thus, the things produced by the layman are authentically original and not the result of an imitation of patterns (*exemplar*) given by nature: *Coclear extra mentis nostrae ideam aliud non habet exemplar (…) Non enim hoc imitor figuram cuiuscunque rei naturalis* (Cusanus 1450, 14 (n. 62)). The *Idiota*-figure thereby becomes, in Blumenberg's eyes, a historical indication that the traditional metaphysical framework of imitation is exploded: "Der Mensch blickt nicht mehr auf die Natur, den Kosmos, um seinen Rang im Seienden abzulesen, sondern auf die Dingwelt, die *sola humana arte* entstanden ist" (NdN 13). The important thing to notice here is that the very idea of human creation constitutes the *legitimate explication* of the theological conception of being created in the image and likeness (*imago et similitudo*) of God (NdN 16). Here, the prominent conceptual elements traditionally attached to God have reached the human self-conception. The important thing in this context is that the discovery of a genuine human creative potential does not take place in a *break with* the theological tradition, but is interpreted as a necessary consequence and legitimate unfolding of the theological idea of man's likeness to God. That man is created in the image of God thus means that hu-

man beings possess a fundamental freedom to create and produce something which has not been seen before. This bringing into being 'out of nothing' (at least out of nothing 'already given') may be interpreted as a 're-occupation' of the theological idea of creation. Whereas the predicate 'creator' had traditionally been reserved to God alone, Cusanas seems to transpose this idea to the human domain. He thereby creates a 'new' room for the ontologically possible which later found its theological formulation and legitimation in the Roman *Sanctum Officium*-decree from 1679: God has donated us his omnipotence just like one donates a house or a book to somebody (Cf. CU 53). The human *vis creativa* thereby becomes the very hallmark of the creator, it becomes a sign of the creator (*signum conditoris*) (CU 56). This becomes particularly evident with the metaphor of trace or vestige (*vestigium*) which, according to Blumenberg, constitutes the leading medieval system of metaphor (*mittelalterliche Leitmetaphorik*) (LM 497/LN 574): The Cusan understanding of 'trace' is not congruent with the Platonic understanding of the world of appearances as a faint image or impression of the original. In this tradition the trace becomes a "static signature of the Creator in His work". Rather, Cusanus understands the trace as "the reference, marking a path, of a fugitive goal to be pursued" (*als die einen Pfad signierende Verweisung eines flüchtigen und zu verfolgenden Zieles*). Thus, the trace has no imitative quality but signals pursuit and connotes movement (LM 498/LN 575).

Another key aspect of Christian theology which, according to Blumenberg, *could have had* relevance to (modern) theology can be found in the Cusan interpretation of *incarnation*. In this idea of divine incarnation, Blumenberg thus sees a potential for "an infinite fortification of human self-respect (*Selbstachtung*)" (LM 595/LN 699). Whereas late medieval Nominalism had placed incarnation under the condition of absolute *divine* freedom – thus leaving man "with no claim to be the essentially privileged creature in nature" (Ibid) – Cusanus finds in the incarnation a fundamental symmetry between man and God. Thus, the Christian motif of "man becoming God and God becoming man" (LM 593/LN 697) has its inner-systematic foundation in the incarnation. That God became human is therefore not a manifestation of a divine restoration made necessary by original sin. It was not man's sin that compelled God to sacrifice his son.

Rather, incarnation forms the *completion* of creation through Christ (*die Vollendung der Schöpfung durch Christus*):

> Die Inkarnation ist nicht eine göttliche Gewalttat von oben, die das Menschliche in die fast unmögliche Einung hineinzwingt, sondern sie ist die in der Schöpfung des Menschen schon angelegte, drängende letzte Möglichkeit des Menschlichen selbst (CU 362)

The attempt to systematically integrate anthropology and Christology means that Cusanus, unlike Scholasticism, was capable of "seeing in the proposition that man was created in God's image something like the motive for the Incarnation" (LM 174/LN 197) – and not the result of human sinfulness. The inner-systematic correlation between God, universe and humans, and the creative dialogue between humans and God, all implies that God is dependent on and in need of humans. Without man Creation would have been in vain: "Ohne die geistige Partnerschaft des Menschen hätte Gott die Welt ins Leere geschaffen" (CU 65). Incarnation and creation hereby become guiding motives for Cusanus's alternative theological system. Here, human self-assertion is not formulated in opposition to the intensification of God's power but rather seen as a closely correlated reflex of God's creativity. Thus, the idea of infinity, which had obtained its destructive absurdity in late medieval theological absolutism, here finds its constructive formulation. What Blumenberg wants to uncover is that the theological predicate of *infinity* is fundamentally ambiguous. It is, in Blumenberg's own words, "speculatively just as fruitful as it is destructive" (LM 529/LN 613). So how does Cusanus breathe new life into the idea of infinity, from Blumenberg's point of view?

One way of answering this question is to return to the inner-systematic tension which Blumenberg had located in Christianity (the problem of the relationship between creation and redemption). This problem receives a remarkable solution in the theology of Cusanus: Deliverance (*Erlösung*) does not mean deliverance *from* the created world but releasement *to* it: In the Incarnation God's transcendence coincides with his immanence which reflects the essence of Cu-

sana's idea of *conincidentia oppositorum* (Cf. PM 182); in the Incarnation, in this 'point of coincidence' God's *infinite transcendence* converges with the world and becomes *infinite immanence*. Here, the idea of infinity is not placed one-sidedly on the side of divine omnipotence but is reflected in the metaphysical triangle of God, cosmos and man as a kind of 'feed-back system' of "synchronized intensifications" (LM 538/LN 627). The reflection on omnipotence, "the most agitating motive of late-medieval speculation" (LM 544/LN 635), finds its solution in and is resolved by Incarnation:

> In der Christusidee des Cusaners wird das theologische Wollen des Spätmittelalters, die Steigerung der Transzendenz Gottes, ausgesöhnt mit dem verzweifelten Willen des Menschen dieser Zeit, vor seinem so erhöhten Gott nicht selbst zunichte zu werden (…) Aber die Inkarnation ist nicht ein unfassbarer Gewaltakt der göttlichen Freiheit und Allmacht, sondern in Christus ist der Mensch deshalb Gott, weil er auf höchste und vollkommenste Mensch ist (CU 68-69)

The intensification of divine transcendence goes hand in hand with the intensification of immanence. Moreover, the idea of God's self-restriction or contraction becomes the point of departure for a re-thinking of infinity. God's *self-contraction* thus means that God 'pulls himself back' *for the benefit of* his creation (Hundeck 2000, 208). God restricts himself in order to leave room for human freedom and thereby open for a *process of infinity* which can be expressed in the words: The actual "never exhausts the range of the possibilities of its realization (…) Nothing actual is what it can be" (LM 544/LN 634). To Cusanus God's infinity is translated into an immanent infinity through the incarnation. One may consider this basic Cusan idea of God's self-contraction as a kind of speculative anticipation of Blumenberg's own philosophical considerations in *Matthäuspassion* where the idea of 'God's world-entanglement' (*die Weltverstrickung Gottes*) (M 123ff) forms the point of departure for Blumenberg's rethinking of the death of God. In other words: The speculative theology of Cusanus *suggests* an alternative theological model for the Modern Age – a model which forms the inspirational background for Blumenberg's own 'theological' conjectures in *Matthäus-*

*passion*; a model which does not get caught up in the unilateral Nominalistic escalation of God's omnipotence, but finds its characteristic features in the idea of divine and human partnership. If Markus Hundeck is right in his claim that Blumenberg wants to undertake a re-thinking of infinity (Hundeck 2000, 19), is seems that the speculative theology of Cusa forms the theoretical background for this effort. Hundeck's evaluation here seems to be relevant:

> Für Blumenberg steht mit Cusanus fest (und wohl über ihn hinaus!), dass ohne ein Heranrücken des Menschen an die Transzendenz, ohne Erhöhung des Menschen, d.h. ohne Selbstbeschränkung Gottes als Gewaltenteilung, der Mensch nur den Weg der unbedingten Selbstbehauptung gehen könne (Hundeck 2000, 212)

It will become clear in the next part of the dissertation that Blumenberg's own theological speculations have their more or less unspoken background in some of these guiding Cusan ideas.

### 4.5 Some Critical Considerations

In my effort to provide a relatively coherent presentation of Blumenberg's thoughts, I have thus far restricted my critical comments to a minimum. But there is no escaping the fact that Blumenberg's attempt to establish a new theory on the genesis of the Modern Age has been met with severe criticism, and on several fronts. Wolfgang Hübener has dismissively characterised Blumenberg's studies of the Modern Age as *pure suggestion*; "eine ingeniöse Erfindung Blumenbergs" (Hübener 1984, 37; Cf. Hübener 1983, 105). Hübener believes that the will to affiliate oneself with such loose historical conjecture is partly motivated by a very low German resistance to intellectual suggestion, partly by a general (apparently likewise German) scepticism towards the possibility of achieving any historical objectivity. Hübener thus calls for Kantian circumspection: "Doxographie ohne Hermeneutik ist blind, Hermeneutik ohne sicheres doxographisches Fundament ist leer" (Hübener 1984, 40). Jürgen Goldstein has taken Blumenberg to task for his interpretation of the Modern Age, and not least

for his interpretation of Ockham. For Goldstein, the relevant textual sources will simply not submit to Blumenberg's obstinately eccentric interpretation of Ockham: The sources have a right of veto, and the sources demand far reaching correctives to Blumenberg's proposals. Moreover, late medieval Nominalism allows an interpretation in which a *balance* between divine power and human rationality can be found which eventually led to "einer Autonomisierung der humanen Subjektivität" (Goldstein 1999, 214; 219 Cf. Goldstein 1998). Blumenberg's strong opposition between divine omnipotence and sparse human rationality does not convince as a historical reflection of this theological tradition, and so it cannot be maintained as an expression of Gnostic voluntarism, which is precisely what Blumenberg claims. When reflecting on what the necessary correctives may eventually mean for Blumenberg's "Dramaturgie der Vernunft" (Goldstein 1998, 294ff) Goldstein answers: "Ich möchte behaupten: wenig" (Goldstein 1999, 220). Why is that? Even though Blumenberg is a remarkably historical thinker, his intentions reach far beyond mere historical reconstruction. Blumenberg's metaphorology tries to get behind the sources; tries to illuminate that which is not explicitly present in the foreground of the texts. His metaphorological enterprise may therefore be described as a kind of 'hermeneutics of historical backgrounds' (Goldstein 1999, 220): As an attempt to reach the 'substructure of thinking' (PM 13) and to reach such "theoretical pretensions and attitudes that remain below the level of the process being discussed (*die noch unterhalb der thematischen Prozessebene liegen*)" (LM 465/LN 540). Now, instead of engaging in an ever more detailed exposition and evaluation of the various attacks on Blumenberg's work, let us rather ask: Which kind of 'truth value' does Blumenberg ascribe to his proposals? What kind of validity does he attach to his enterprise? For only by answering these questions, will we be able to judge Blumenberg's project on its own terms.

It seems undeniable that historical interpretation has a complexity-reducing function. Historical interpretation establishes order and meaning "wo tausend kleine Ursachen wirkten" (Nietzsche 1874, 247) and thus offers an articulation of a certain historical self-understanding. I have already stressed what I referred to as the *metaphorological* dimensions of Blumenberg's studies of modernity. Blu-

menberg works within a 'memorial' and 'imaginative' horizon (Cf. Stoellger 2003, 132). His guiding question seems to be: Which past did we think we had and/or could have? In answering *this* question Blumenberg does not offer a definitive answer but rather advances a *hypothetical suggestion* or a *hypothetical proposal* (Cf. LM 115/AM 127). As the 'product' of a work of memory history is not infallible but unavoidably marked by a certain degree of contingency. What we have is not *a* historical self-identity – but rather *possible* historical self-understandings. Philipp Stoellger is right when he states that Blumenberg's memorially operating phenomenology of history "die pragmatische Funktion der *Ermöglichung hypothetischer Selbstverständigung* wahrnimmt" (Stoellger 2003, 155). If one were to point to a *possible* inspirational background for such an attempt, Kant would not be a bad point of departure. In his *Mutmaßlicher Anfang der Menschengeschichte* (1786b), Kant admits the need for 'speculations' (*Mutmaßungen*) in order to make transitions conceivable (*um den Übergang begreiflich zu machen*) (Kant 1786, 85 (A 1)) – even though such an enterprise can appear like a draft of a novel (*den Entwurf zu einem Roman*). The point here is that Kant seems to recognise the need for the reflective power of judgement (*der reflektierenden Urteilskraft*) and its imaginative capacities to function as a guideline (*Leitfaden*) in order to present "ein sonst planloses *Aggregat* menschlicher Handlungen, wenigstens im Grossen, als ein *System*" (Kant 1784, 48 (A 407) Cf. Breitling 2006, 272). Even though Blumenberg does not make any strong claims about the nature of history, he does seem to adopt the Kantian idea that history cannot simply be understood empirically but must also be speculatively imagined. Blumenberg's studies of modernity constitute a speculative attempt to account of the genesis of the Modern Age. It offers an alternative evaluation of the Modern Age by interpreting it as a process of theological autolysis.

**5. Some Conclusions**

We are now in a position to sum up some of the consequences of the previous the discussion.

a) Let us first ask: Which God it is that Blumenberg's takes leave with. The immediate answer to this question seems to be: The absolutistic God of the late medieval period. This God is an absolutistic being whose attributes are "optimised all around with universal quantifiers" (*Allquantoren*) (WM 213/AM 238)[27], a sovereign maximal God who is extensively conceived as *infinite* and *unchangeable*.[28] To say that Blumenberg 'takes leave with' this absolutistic conception of God is *in itself* is, in and of itself, not particularly informative. Allow me to elaborate. Blumenberg's leave-taking with the absolutistic God is first of all an *indirect* leave-taking because it takes place through an endorsement of the legitimacy of the Modern Age. Blumenberg thus wants to qualify the *legitimacy* of the Modern Age by showing that it represents a – legitimate – break with the Gnostic features of theological absolutism. The doctrine of omnipotence eventually displays its destructive absurdity leaving it to human beings themselves to find orientation and new points of reference in a world overshadowed by God's opaque power and unrestricted will. Human self-assertion is the legitimate answer to this renewal of a fundamental 'Gnostic' assumption; namely, the assumption that the omnipotent God and the God of salvation "are no longer conceivable" by human reason as one and the same and therefore can no longer "be related to one another for the purposes of man's interest in the world" (LM 172/LN 194-195). Thus, Blumenberg's conclusion is that the Modern Age is the second overcoming of Gnosticism; it constitutes itself as a legitimate attempt to create distance from the theological absolutism of late Middle Ages. To claim that the Modern Age is legitimate also means that its leave-taking with a *specific* 'model of God' (namely the absolutistic) is justifiable. When Marquard and

[27] John Locke (1632-1704), for instance, has articulated and endorsed this 'absolutistic' conception of God in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690), where he states that God is omniscient since he "knows all things, past, present and to come" (Locke 1690, 58), and that "God is without beginning, eternal, unalterable, and everywhere, and therefore concerning his identity there can be no doubt" (Locke 1690, 163).

[28] Since the first ecumenical council, The First Council of Nicaea in 325 AD, the doctrine of God's unchangeability has played a key role in the history of dogmatics. The background for this idea is, however, Greek metaphysics where unchangeability forms an incontestable axiom (Cf. Hundeck 2000, 235).

Wetz (Cf. Marquard 1999, 21; Wetz 2004, 95) suggest interpreting Blumenberg through their preferred interpretative key (that humans have a fundamental *need of relief from absolutism* including the absolutism of God) they tend towards a one-sided banalisation of Blumenberg's 'Auseinandersetzung' with the question of God. Although human self-assertion can undeniably be interpreted convincingly as a *relief* from *theological absolutism*, it is worth noting that Blumenberg also has an eye for the *productive* aspects of this absolutistic idea of God. The 'absolutistic' conception of God is not unambiguously 'bad' since it gave rise to a new horizon of possibilities for the articulation of human self-understandings. Thus, the absolutistic God has functioned as a significant medium of reflection with regard to human self-constitution:

> Die Kühnste Metapher, die die Größte Spannung zu umfassen suchte, hat daher vielleicht am meisten für die Selbstkonstitution des Menschen geleistet: indem er den Gott als das Ganz-Andere von sich absolut hinwegzudenken versuchte, begann er unaufhaltsam den schwierigsten rhetorischen Akt, nämlich den, sich mit diesem Gott zu vergleichen (AAR 135)

The abstract opposition between (the absolutistic) God and (the relief-demanding) humans is too one-sided. It fails to recognise that human self-understanding has been decisively 'pre-formed' *by means of* the conceptual resources of theological absolutism. The formation of new human self-understanding has taken place through an incubation of conceptual elements from theology (Cf. NdN 23). Therefore, theological absolutism also holds an *ambiguous* status; even *the absolute metaphor of God as absolute* holds a significant anthropological potential. Thus, also *this* God must be remembered. If Blumenberg's (unspoken) guiding question was: Which God did we think we could hope for? His answer (in *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*) seems to be: A God conceived as absolute timeless, needless, and omniscient, but a God whose absolutistic qualities eventually led to self-dissolution. The important thing to bear in mind here is that Blumenberg does not simply *negate* this conception of God (Cf. Stoellger 2003, 134). Rather, his aim is to make transparent the inner-systematic

paradoxality of this particular conception of God thereby making room for an *alternative* God. This will become more evident in the next and last part of my dissertation.

b) Another important thing in the present part of the dissertation has been to elucidate what could be characterised as *the theological background of atheism*. The possibility of thinking the non-existence of God, of thinking *etsi deus non daretur*, becomes possible within a theological horizon of reflection (Cf. Marquard 1958, 82-83/Stoellger 2003, 144ff). According to Blumenberg, the background for speaking about 'the death of God' thus is to be found in the (process of) 'self-dissolution' of the theological system of the Middle Ages (*Autokatalyse des mittelalterlichen Systems*) (LM 467/LN 543). Since a *hidden* God is pragmatically as good as a *dead* one, as Blumenberg's monumentally argues, the 'atheistic climate' of modernity finds its historical background in late Scholastic Nominalism where God's transcendence is radicalised. However, Blumenberg's account of the genesis of the Modern Age does not only form an alternative to (different kinds of) secularisation theories; it also operates with the idea of *different alternatives within this alternative*. Here, the memorial-imaginative dimension of Blumenberg's metaphorology discloses itself: Blumenberg's metaphorological reopening of the question about the constitution of modernity is not only an attempt to shed light on an alternative historical 'sequence of events'; it also constitutes an *imaginative work of variation* which takes into consideration the hypothetical question: *What could have been*. The speculative theology of Cusanus forms, as we touched upon, such an intruding alternative for Blumenberg, which may form the implicit point of departure for Blumenberg's own 'theological' variations in *Matthäuspassion*.

c) Furthermore, it should be noticed that 'the death of God' is not identical with the definitive disappearance of God. Even though Blumenberg *relates* the *deus absconditus*-theology of late medieval Nominalism with the 'death of God' he does not *identify* them. Blumenberg's claim rather seems to be that the Modern

Age inherits a number of questions and problems which cannot simply be reduced to silence since they form the prolonged background of expectations to which the Modern Age has to somehow work out new answers. Blumenberg's claim about the connection between late medieval *deus absconditus*-theology and 'the death of God' should therefore be taken *cum grano salis*. The Modern Age surely does not abruptly bury *any* concept of God. As we have seen the Modern Age rather has a *double face* in so far that it forms two different (theological) answers to the threatening challenge of theological absolutism: *Hypothetical atheism* and rational *Deism*. Moreover, Blumenberg seems to operate with a (perhaps somewhat surprising) idea about the *possibility of another outcome* of the Middle Ages, i.e. the possibility of a *theological* overcoming of Gnosticism (Cf. Stoellger 2003, 149-150). This alternative possibility is based on a rather sharp distinction between a *philosophical* and a *biblical* understanding of God.

d) Blumenberg touches on this distinction at several places. His claim seems to be that the theological absolutism of the late Middle Ages was the result of an (often recognised) 'process of amalgamation' of Greek metaphysics and a biblical idea of God. In this very process of amalgamation the biblical God of creation was "raised to an omnipotent being" (LM 132/LN 145). The biblical God of passion, the "God for whom interest in man and the capacity to be affected by human events and actions had been constitutive" (LM 175/LN 198-199) thereby was deprived from all his affections and sterilised at the hands of philosophy. Does this mean that Blumenberg shares the critique of 'onto-theology' as a certain 'foundationalist' way of conceiving God which has generally marked Continental philosophy of religion in the 20th Century (Cf. Wrathall 2003)? Does it mean that Blumenberg is (yet another late-modern) critic of theism? Possibly, but the matter is rather more complicated. Markus Hundeck has thus persuasively argued that Blumenberg is less *anti-theistic* than has often been suggested. Hundeck's claim is that Blumenberg's main intention is to *historicise* the concept of God (*vergeschichtligung des Gottesverständnis*) in order to avoid an overly solid, fixed conception of divinity (Hundeck 2000, 207). In other words: By historicising God he is unchaining the divine from the dogmatic attempts to freeze him into immoveable invari-

ability. Here Blumenberg's own words, admittedly stated in a rather different context, may serve as the theoretical background: "Unhistoricalness (*Ungeschichtlichkeit*) is an opportunistic way of easing our march, with disastrous consequences" (WM 165/AM 183). The point of departure for such an 'avoidance of unhistoricalness' can be found in a separation between the biblical and the philosophical concept of God. Blumenberg here seems to sympathise with the (Cusan) idea of a God who is not enclosed in a reflexive circle of absolute self-reference but has a genuine *interest in* and indissoluble *dependence on* his own creatures. A God, in other words, who "had irrevocably obliged himself to the only creature He made in his own image" and therefore also saw himself committed "to man's need for happiness" (LM 174/LN 197). The *imago Dei*-tradition thus seems to form the background for Blumenberg's 'anti-Gnostic' outlining of an alternative idea of God, a God quite different from the philosophically purified, absolutistic God of Scholasticism:

> The biblical God, Who seemed to have involved Himself so passionately in the history of man and had bequeathed to human behaviour the whole scale of great affects – anger, revenge, partiality – can hardly be recognized any more as the prototype of the God described in the speculations of Scholasticism (LM 174-175/LN 198-199)

The background for Blumenberg's leave-taking with God is thus to be found in this (Pascalian inspired) distinction between a philosophical and a biblical understanding of God (a distinction which recurs in Blumenberg's critique of dogma, and his rehabilitation of myth, to which I shall return shortly). Moreover, this distinction can be seen as an attempt to historicise God, thereby opening up a new 'horizon of possibilities' (GkW 623/724) and new 'latitudes for variation' in relation to the question of God.

e) Finally, Blumenberg's 'evaluation' of the Cusan theology as a *third* alternative which constitutes an alternative point of attachment for theology in the Modern Age has been taken into consideration. Blumenberg's interpretation of Cusanus

may be said to form a paradigm for Blumenberg's own philosophy of religion. As a *possible alternative* to theological absolutism Cusanus's theology has been *forgotten* (Cf. Stoellger 2000, 419); Blumenberg's intention is not, however, simply to rescue the speculative theology of Cusaus from oblivion. Rather, Cusanus may be said to form the inspirational background for Blumenberg's own rethinking of the idea of infinity. Moreover, Blumenberg seems to give voice to an idea which could be epitomised as *memorial infinity* in relation to the question of God. It is to this very idea we must now turn.

# Part III
# The Memory of God

In the third and final part of this dissertation we turn to a more systematic treatment of the main theme of my thesis: The memory of God. My intention in the first part was to establish a theoretical framework for Blumenberg's philosophy

of religion. I here qualified Blumenberg's metaphorology as an 'after-metaphysical work of memory' which adopts and expands a number of phenomenological concepts to the wider field of history, thus resulting in what Blumenberg refers to as a 'phenomenology of history'. The relevance of memory was here described at two levels: First, the unavoidability of memory for self-preservation and self-identity of *consciousness* was transformed into a hypothesis about the unavoidability of memory for *historical* self-preservation and identity: The constitution of historical identity takes places through the (more or less involuntary) memory of questions, answers and absolute metaphors which actively form the motivating background expectations of a given presence. Secondly, the relevance of memory was qualified as the result of the divergence between life-time and world-time: In the idea of a *culture of retention*, Blumenberg seems to locate a possible antidote against human finitude which points to the idea of *mutual self-preservation through memory*.

In the second part, I considered relevant aspects of Blumenberg's wide-ranging work on the genesis of modernity. My primary intention here was to focus on the genesis of Modern Age as the epoch for 'the death of God'. More specifically, I argued that Blumenberg's studies of early modernity find their implicit guiding stance in the metaphorological question: Which God did we think we could have? Or: Which God did we need to abandon? Also, the historical account given in the second part, carrying the title "Leave-taking with God", forms the background for the more systematic considerations to which we shall now turn. Of particular importance here will be Blumenberg's distinction between a *philosophical* and a *biblical-mythological* understanding of God.

In this the third part of my dissertation, I turn my attention to Blumenberg's ways of linking 'the death of God' with 'the memory of God'. However, in order to demonstrate the *systematic* fruitfulness of memory in relation to the question of God, it is necessary for me to go 'beyond' Blumenberg's own, explicit assumptions. Thus, in order to call forth the *systematic proposals*, which are more or less explicitly present in Blumenberg's writings, it is necessary to confront Blumenberg's philosophy of religion with 'foreign' lines of reflection. I will therefore draw on secondary philosophical resources which may shed light on both the

potentials and limits of memory when applied to the question of God. Let me begin by sketching the overall structure of this last part:

a) Firstly, I shall touch on Blumenberg's distinction between *myth* and *dogma*. My claim is that Blumenberg indirectly (and in particular through his readings in Nietzsche) seems to give voice to an idea about *remythicisation of theology*. This expression immediately invites misunderstandings. It must therefore be qualified in which way this idea finds its expression in Blumenberg's work on myth. Moreover, Blumenberg's idea of functional 're-occupation', introduced in *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, here finds its parallel in an idea about *imaginative variations* of theological doctrines – first of all exemplified in the Myth of Paradise. Moreover, my aim is to show that Nietzsche's 'dead God' is not necessarily identical with a forgotten one (an interpretation which finds support in Nietzsche's background metaphorics). Furthermore, Nietzsche's idea about *active forgetfulness* must be challenged by an idea about *involuntary remembrance*. The argument of the prelude here finds a shift of accent which may be formulated like this: Even a dead God seems difficult not to rememberforget.

b) Secondly, I shall give an account of Blumenberg's variations of *the death and passion of God*, conveyed (primarily) in *Matthäuspassion*. Blumenberg's strategy of interpretation here seems to be that by leaving the *Resurrection* out of account and thus taking the death of God 'at face value', a certain idea of *memorial durability* is obtained. Moreover, the basic idea is that God, by handing himself over to a human community of remembrance, obtains a kind 'resistance to corrosion'. In short: As one who *has been* God *cannot* henceforth *not* have been. Through his death God becomes something 'irredeemably former' (*das untilgbare Gewesensein*) (LW 360). The decisive point is, however, that God is thereby not simply established in unchangeable eternity. Rather, God is handed over to human memory and thereby given what I would call a backward-turned, *memorial infinity*, i.e. made the point of departure for endless receptions and re-interpretations through a

c) Thirdly, I shall (partly inspired by Freud, partly by Catherine Malabou's reading of Hegel) turn my attention to the relation between three different models of mourning: *Melancholy*, *nostalgia* and *work of memory*. I shall argue that the 'memory of God' must be understood as the latter, i.e. as a *work of memory*. Moreover, I shall (inspired by Malabou and Nietzsche) bring the idea of *plasticity* in relation to this *work of memory*. The guiding strategy of interpretation here is that God is the result of the plasticity of a human work of memory. As such God is not unchangeable but submitted to *the subjunctive of the possible*. Furthermore, I shall touch on Hegel's alternative model of memory, suggesting the *possibility* of understanding 'the memory of God' as a *double* genitive, i.e. *both* as our remembrance of God *and* as God's remembrance of us. Or more precisely: As God's self-remembrance through humans. On the face of it, this idea seems to collide with the idea of the death of God. How can a dead God remember anything? I shall argue, that by understanding the reality of God through the suggested idea of *Wirklichkeit* – as 'that which leaves traces' – a *possible* interpretation of the double genitive may be articulated like this: We not only remember God; we also remember a God who remembered us. In this sense *our* memory of God is *in-formed* by an idea of a *God* who remembers us. In this sense 'the memory of God' becomes the speculative point of departure for a kind of *mutual* self-preservation between God and humans: We remember God, because (we also remember a) God who remembered us. Our memory of God not only *gives form to* God, but is also *in-formed by* the God we remember. At least as an *image of hope against death* (Ernst Bloch) this idea can be said to possess *Wirklichkeit*.

These hypotheses are central to the last part of this dissertation. It is to their development and defence that I now turn.

**1. Work on Myth**

The question about the philosophical relevance and function of myth constitutes a pivotal point of reflection in modern continental philosophy. Since Horkheimer and Adornos influential work, *Dialektik der Aufklärung*, was published in 1944 (English 1972) the question about myth seems to have regained an important place in the philosophical landscape and thus been rehabilitated as a vital source of reflection. To designate this 'turn' to the rationality of myth as 'new' or 'late-modern' is, from one point of view, quite misleading, since it neglects the central role that myth plays in the history of philosophy; a role that is not only implicitly inherent to our philosophical discourses but also – at least to some point – explicitly articulated as 'rational'.

At a first glance Blumenberg's ideas seems to be inscribed into this new philosophical landscape. Blumenberg thus affiliates himself with the view that myth itself holds a rational potential that, rightly seen, undermines the clear-cut separation of myth and reason. Moreover, it might be possible to *distinguish* between myth and reason; but to discern them distinctively is impossible. Does this claim imply a fundamental leave-taking with the basic achievements of the Enlightenment as far as the explanatory power of science compared to that of religion is concerned? Has the boundaries between myth and reason been irrevocably erased or sponged out? Not at all; for it is important to understand that our *insight* into the indistinct boundary lines between 'myth' and 'reason' is itself a work of reason. As Blumenberg remarks,

> No one will want to maintain that myth has better arguments than science (…) Nevertheless, it has something to offer that – even with reduced claims to reliability, certainty, faith, realism, and intersubjectivity – still constitutes satisfaction of intelligent expectations. The quality on which this depends can be designated by the term *significance* (*Bedeutsamkeit*), taken from Dilthey (WM 67/AM 76-77)

When Blumenberg maintains the 'untranslatability' of myth, the attempt to give mythical narrative and image some "theoretical lucidity" (WM 266/AM 294), it

is not in order to establish room for a hopeful revival of the ancient gods. Romantic desires for a 're-enchantment of the world' are not on Blumenberg's agenda. Modern science has taken decisive steps in the direction of providing reasons for our understanding of the world and increased our explanatory power exponentially. We neither shall nor can we abandon these scientific advancements. On the contrary, Blumenberg's aim is to investigate the rationality of myth on a *functional* level, thus pointing to its establishment of significance (*Bedeutsamkeit*) and world-orientation.

In *Arbeit am Mythos* (1979), Blumenberg introduces another concept which equally serves as a limit concept. It is the concept of the "absolutism of reality" (WM 3/AM 9). This concept basically functions as the counter-concept to the concept of the life-world. Where the life-world was defined by its complete lack of contingency, the absolutism of reality implies the idea of a world in which no necessity, no order, no meaning and no adjustment between human consciousness and reality is possible. It is a world saturated with contingency defying any kind of meaning or significance. Again this state is – being a hypothetical, extrapolated limit concept – a state which we have always left behind us. Expressed in the language of phenomenology: The 'absolutism of reality' is a world in which intentionality (as a feature of human self-preservation) is *impossible*; where in a life-world any kind of intentionality is *superfluous* (Lysemose 2003, 99).

We are never confronted with the absolutism of reality in itself just as we never find ourselves except as having already left the life-world. Thus, we have always-already begun to gain distance from the absolutism of reality by means of stories, concepts, myths, names, narratives, symbols, ideas etc. Or more generally speaking: We are always preoccupied with our self-preserving intentional achievements. Now, in Blumenberg's point of view, myths function as a way of tearing down the unbearable absolutism of reality by making it inhabitable, meaningful and recognizable. This "work on the reduction of the absolutism of reality" (WM 7/AM 13) has always already begun; we are "always already on this side of the absolutism of reality" (WM 9/AM 15). Moreover, Blumenberg sees the rationality of myth in its function as "the manifestation of an overcom-

ing, of the gaining of distance" (*Distanzgewinn*) (WM 16/AM 23). The absolutism of reality may be described as a situation of pure and overwhelming anxiety, or in the language of phenomenology: A paradoxical 'situation' in which the intentionality of consciousness is without any objects (WM 4/AM 10). In a sense, it is the (impossible) situation of a reality without possibilities. The reason of myth consists in its "reduction function" (*Abbaufunktion*) (WM 63/AM 73) in regard to the absolutism of reality.

Blumenberg also describes myth in terms of the 'question-answer-model'. The basic function of myth is, he claims, to 'disarm' or 'defuse' questions *before* they become explicitly articulated questions: "Myths do not answer questions; they make things unquestionable" (WM 126/AM 142). Myth is, one could say, an answer to a question which is never really asked because the myth 'deactivates' the very need and desire to ask the question to which it provides the answer. Blumenberg points to the mythical character of highly abstract titles like: 'History', 'I', 'Spirit', 'Being', 'the unconscious', claiming that

> Such total schemata (*Totalentwürfe*) are mythical precisely in the fact that they drive out the desire to ask for more and to invent more to add. While they do not provide answers to questions, they make it seem as though there is nothing left to ask about (WM 288/AM 319)

Myth "does not need to answer questions; it makes something up before the question becomes acute, and so that it does not become acute" (WM 197/AM 219). Were one now to ask: In what does the *difference* between 'myth' and 'reason' consist? Blumenberg's answer would be: "Myth itself is a piece of high-carat 'work of logos' (WM 12/AM 18). This is a strikingly bold declaration, and it finds support in Blumenberg's preoccupation with the *function* of myth. This function consists in the "process of working free the absolutism of reality" (Ibid). Moreover, the boundary line between 'reason' and 'myth' is unattainable because it fails to recognise the *'logos* of *mythos'*; it overlooks the *rational* function of myth in the process of overcoming the absolutism of reality:

> (…) the antithesis between myth and reason is a late and poor invention, because it forgoes seeing the function of myth, in the overcoming of that archaic unfamiliarity of the world, as itself a rational function, however due for expiration (*verfallsbedürftig*) its means may seem after the event (WM 48/AM 56)

It can be rational, says Blumenberg, "not to be rational to the utmost extent" (*nicht bis zum Letzten vernünftig zu sein*) (WM 163/AM 180-181). This is no licence to irrationality, no attempt to reintroduce new gods or revive the fables of a remote past. It is a claim about the *limits of rationality* or rather: It is an attempt to recognise the rationality of things "for which no rational foundation is given" (Ibid) and thus a turn against the excessive *Begründungseuphorie*, the extravagant attitude towards the establishment of rational foundations. It may be that the antithesis between reason and myth is in fact that of *science* and myth (Cf. WM 49/AM 57), but that does not mean that importance of myths is reduced:

> To bring myth to an end was once supposed to have been the work of logos. This consciousness of itself on the part of philosophy – or better, of the historians of philosophy – is contradicted by the fact that the work aimed at putting an end to myth is again and again accomplished in the form of the metaphor of myth (WM 629/AM 681)

In the terms of Blumenberg's phenomenological anthropology, myths function by creating *distance* from an unbearably indifferent reality by attempting to regain a situation of confidence which has its (unattainable) *limit value* in the aforementioned life-world concept. Thus, the absolutism of reality correspondingly describes a *terminus a quo* that we have always left behind us. The absolutism of reality signifies a world of monstrous chaos and nameless uncertainty. It is never a reality that we experience but rather serves as a theoretical limit concept. As such it indicates the idea of a 'reality' that is the hypothetical starting point for Blumenberg's theory on myth, the description of that which lies 'before' mankind's cultural and symbolic productions; i.e. that which precedes our shaping of reality. Blumenberg refers to it – in deliberately paradoxical terms – as the "past's past" (*Vorvergangenheit*) and explicitly remarks that it has an an-

thropogenetic function: "What justifies us in using this limit concept is the common core of all currently respected theories on the subject of anthropogenesis" (WM 4/AM 9).

As David Adams remarks, the reader will "once again recognize the influence of Cassirer, who proposes the use of such 'limit concepts' as a way to account for the totality of reality without resorting to metaphysics" (Adams 1991, 162). Blumenberg's intention is to shed light on the anthropogenetic relevance and function of myth. The relevance of myth thereby becomes as visible as a kind of *memorial imagination* of that which lies 'before' history, the 'unthinkable'. Myths (and absolute metaphors) are means of substitution for the unthinkable (*das Un(vor)denkbare*) (H 11): "Das Unvordenkbare lässt sich offenbar nur narrativ bewältigen" (Safranski 1997, 65). In this regard, the myth of Paradise plays a decisive role as a myth about the beginning. Again, this manoeuvre should not be understood as an attempt to revitalise an old myth's inherent dogmatic 'truth claim' (whatever that might be). The decisive factor in this regard is that the myth of Paradise has not exhausted its 'hermeneutical' resources and interpretational reserves – and probably never will so. It still holds significance since it fulfils certain 'methodological' elucidating requests in relation to the phenomenological idea of a primeval state (*Urzustand*).

### 1.1 Myth and Dogma

A focal point in Blumenbergs philosophical considerations is based on a quite sharp distinction between myth and dogma. First introduced in an article which ran to almost 75 pages (*Wirklichkeitsbegriff und Wirkungspotential des Mythos, 1971),* and developed in the major publication *Work on Myth* (*Arbeit am Mythos* (1979)), Blumenberg's critique of dogma, obliquely formulated thought it is, opens up an alternative idea of theological reflection. Indeed, these works can be considered an indirect way of sketching out an alternative idea of God. Again, the relation between Blumenberg and his own material is rather complicated. The metaphorical expression 'work on' in the title of his book may, however,

suggest a plausible interpretation. Blumenberg distinguishes between 'the work *of* myth' (which, as we have seen, consists in the *de-intensification* of 'the absolutism of reality') and 'the work *on* myth' (which seems to be the title of Blumenberg's own philosophical undertaking) and claims that one must "already have the work of myth behind one in order to be able to apply oneself to the work on myth (…)" (WM 266/AM 294). This immediately seems to suggest that there subsists an *exclusive disjunction* between the 'work of myth' and the 'work on myth'. That would seem to presuppose that myth (as such) could be brought to end – a claim Blumenberg explicitly rejects (Cf. WM 633/AM 685). Rather, his idea is that myths have *always-already* undergone reception; myths are only available to us in the form of continuous acts of reception, which seems to be the essential claim behind one of the chapter headings: "The reception of the sources produces the sources of the reception" (WM 299ff/AM 329ff).[29]

Blumenberg explicitly addresses the relation between his work on myth and the work carried out by myths in the following observation:

> Assuming the thesis that myth, as the earliest way of processing the terrors of the unknown and overwhelming power, is itself a mode of action that contributes to the humanisation of the world, and that work on myth *continues* this action as a *historical* one, the question necessarily arises as to the reflexive comprehension of this function and the potential for pursuing its immanent tendency: for humanising what is already humanisation (…) That this could be connected with the level of reflection that is characteristic of *historicism* is something that one will be able to presume from the outset (WM 388/AM 424, my italics)

[29] Assertions about the *origin* of myth remain, according to Blumenberg, nothing but a speculative *fata morgana*, a "myth of mythology" (*Mythos der Mythologie*) (WbW 351). Presumably directed against Heidegger's pathos of 'originality' (*Ursprünglichkeit*), Blumenberg calls attention to the fact that neither Homer, Hesiod, nor the Pre-Socratics represent anything in any meaningful way 'original'. Such primordial ideas of originality remain, Blumenberg argues, a mere hypothesis "(…) deren einzige Verifikationsbasis die Rezeption ist" (WbW 351). Here again we find a claim about the impossibility of absolute beginnings.

Blumenberg's work *on* myth is a historical continuation of the work already undertaken *by* myth, by means of philosophical reflection: The humanisation of the world. My claim is that Blumenberg's work on myth may also be interpreted as a way in which Blumenberg undertakes a *remythicisation of theology (or dogma)* by means of an idea about imaginative variations. Admittedly, this claim seems to contradict Blumenberg's own words when he states that almost all attempts at "remythicisation originate in a longing for the compelling quality of those supposedly early discoveries of meaning, but they were frustrated and will continue to be frustrated by the unrepeatability of the conditions of their genesis" (WM 161/AM 178). My claim therefore has to be clarified: Blumenberg does *not* aim at uncovering a repressed or forgotten 'original meaning' of a given myth, but he *does* use a (Nietzschean inspired) idea of a *remythicisation of God* as the underlying axis of argumentation and as a 'model' for his imaginative variations of the myth of paradise. My claim is that Blumenberg undertakes in regard to the question of God what he (in relation to the history of science) refers to as an expansion of the "latitudes for possible changes" or an extension of "the breadth of variation" (Cf. GkW 131/GdK 158).

What distinguishes *myth* from *dogma*? One answer offered by Blumenberg is that myth is more suitable for reception than "the timelessness of dogma" (WM 98/AM 111), because the breadth of variation of myths and their interpretational 'openness' is significantly greater than that of dogma. Unlike the dogmatic mode of thinking, myth is not aiming at securing a certain substantial content, by freezing it as a timeless necessity. As already pointed out, the *content* of myths is secondary and thus less important than their *function*. Whereas myth holds an incessant potential for re-occupation, dogma strives at definitiveness: "In myth, the total and definitive do not occur; they are products of dogmatic abstraction" (WM 267/AM 296).

Also the discredited mythology of the Greeks "'prescribed' to the nascent philosophy what questions it had to assume responsibility for and what systematic scope it had to possess" (LM 66-67/LN 77) but not in the form of substantial claims about reality but rather as tacitly handed over *expectations*. According to

Blumenberg, myth holds a higher degree of plasticity and interpretative flexibility than the dogmatic mode of thought because it allows "impudent and satirical exaggerations of its contradictions" (WM 217/AM 241). The mythical mode of thought is characterised by "an almost unlimited capacity for combining heterogeneous elements (*Vereinigungsfähigkeit heterogener Elemente*)" (WM 237/AM 264). Moreover, myth doesn't have any 'adherents' (*Anhänger*) or any 'outsiders', it lacks any "tendency towards self-purification" and towards the "judgment of souls" (WM 237-238/AM 264-265). In this context Blumenberg refers his readers to Nietzsche's words: "The old Greeks without a normative theology: everyone has the right to contribute, poetically (*das Recht, daran zu dichten*), and can believe whatever he likes" (WM 239/AM 267; Cf. WbW 335). Dogmatic thought is forged amidst heresy; it rebels against the fact that people and communities have, to echo Nietzsche, believed whatever they liked. In the Christian context, as in other religious contexts, heresy is the consequence of the fact that there was more than one route to be taken "in evading the difficulties contained in the original contents of the Holy Scriptures" (WM 217/AM 241). But these different routes would never be seen as equally legitimate by those who followed them. It was almost inevitable that one of them would rise to prominence, with requisite power to "determine the other as wrong" (Ibid). Moreover, dogma has to insist on "the irrelevance of time for its definitions" (WM 100/AM 114), and the transition to abstract conceptualisations is merely a way, Blumenberg argues, "of avoiding the difficulties that arise on the historical and perceptual level (*der historisch-anschaulich entstandenen Schwierigkeiten*)" (WM 217/AM 241) and that means above all: A way of liquidating the human need for aesthetical intuition and poetic creativity in favour of "the absolute purity of the concept" (WM 229/AM 254). Blumenberg is aware, of course, that there is such a thing as the history of doctrines, but his claim is that the dominating effort here is to attain unquestionable certainty and not to establish room for variation:

> Der Unterschied zwischen einer dogmatischen und einer mythischen Tradition sowie zwischen den ihnen zugeordneten Rezeptionsakten liegt nicht im bloßen Maß der Veränderung ihrer Inhalte. Immerhin

> gibt es als Disziplin die Dogmengeschichte; aber sie beschreibt das Anwachsen eines substantiellen Bestandes und die Ausbildung seiner terminologischen Eindeutigkeit. Ihr Thema ist eine auf Entmutigung aller Abwandlungsgelüste angelegte Geschichte (WbW 340-341)

Myth resembles a *musical variation* which lives on the verge of the recognisable (Cf. WbW 341), whereas dogma rebels against ambiguity, striving for the possession of one clear meaning. The similarities between myth and the suggestive power of musical variations (an idea which has a Nietzschean background) is of particular importance to Blumenberg's own considerations in *Matthäuspassion* – an idea I will be returning to shortly.

It should be clear from these few observations that Blumenberg subscribes to a rather sharp distinction between dogma and myth. It seems obvious that his critical engagement with dogma somehow reflects his general *anti-substantialism*, which also motivated his critique of the secularisation theory. Moreover, Blumenberg's sympathy for the malleability of myth, its inherent capacity for 're-occupations' may be said to point towards his own 'theology', which bears the imprint of a speculative variation on various Christian doctrines. More specifically, Blumenberg makes 'the death of God' theme the subject of imaginative variations. Unlike Christian orthodoxy (*orthodoxein*: To have the right opinion), which aims at formulating a number of unshakeable truths, and therefore to know all that is worth knowing, Blumenberg hails myth's tendency towards free variation and conjecture. It is precisely this idea about free variation which forms the basis for Blumenberg's philosophical speculations.

### 1.2 Some Critical Considerations

Joachim von Soosten has criticised Blumenberg's sharp-edged opposition between dogma and myth for overlooking the *narrative character* of the Biblical stories. Moreover, von Soosten finds that Blumenberg's sharp antithetic between 'polytheistic myth' and 'monotheistic dogma' fails to acknowledge the fact that the Bible constitutes a narrative fact *sui generis* which holds a polyphonic score

of meanings (von Soosten 1990, 88-89). Moreover, von Soosten criticises Blumenberg's evaluation of the Christian-Jewish prohibition of the making of images (*Bilderverbot*) as an expression of God's fundamental *invisibility* and inscrutable untouchableness[30]: Whereas myth disposes at a high degree of vivid visible forms of representation, the "invisible press toward processing in the form of dogma" (WM 221/AM 245) – so Blumenberg argues. But even though the prohibition of images undeniably serves as a theological attempt to *distinguish* between God and world, this is by no means identical with "den Verzicht auf jede anschauliche Vorstellung"; the true intention of the prohibition of images does not aim at the renunciation of "anschaulicher Gestalt und Erzählung (…) sondern es muss vielmehr als *Anweisung* aufgefasst werden, *wie* von Jahwe geredet werden soll" (von Soosten 1990, 91). According to von Soosten, Blumenberg generally overlooks the *eschatological horizon* in which the prohibition of images is inscribed and which establishes another conception of *time* different from that of myth. The prohibition of images finds its decisive parallel in God's concealment on the Cross (*Verborgenheit Gottes am Kreuz*) which, according to von Soosten, does not mean that God is somehow absent or withdraws himself but quite the contrary: That the very *essence* of God is 'spoken out' in the suffering humanity of his existence:

> Dies ist Sinn jener *absconditas sub contrario,* die Gottes macht und Herrlichkeit unter ihrem Gegenteil, in Menschlichkeit und Niedrigkeit, heilsam präsent sieht. Die Abscondität Gottes sub contrario bil-

[30] Against this interpretation Markus Hundeck argues that Blumenberg indirectly concords with a prevalent Jewish idea: "Blumenbergs Philosophie korrespondiert mit jüdisch inspiriertem Denken, ohne dass er selber eine wie immer geartete konfessionelle Einordnung vorgenommen hat. Denn Jüdisches Denken steht und fällt mit dem Bildverbot, mit der Insistenz auf Bestreitung, das Ganze der Wirklichkeit, seine Essenz im Bild zu fassen und zum Maßstab aller Verhaltungen in und an der Welt zu machen" (Cf. Hundeck 2000, 24; 217). The prohibition of the making of images thus finds its reflex in Blumenberg's dismissal of any attempt to represent totality with absolute conclusiveness. Hundeck thus speaks of the *iconoclastic aspects* of Blumenberg's thinking (Hundeck 2000, 51), thereby suggesting that the pronounced resistance to subordinate the world to a single image could be interpreted also as a Jewish impulse in Blumenberg's thinking.

> det gleichsam ein *kreuzestheologisches Konzentrat*, mit dem nicht nur der metaphysischen Grenzziehung zwischen Sichtbarem und Unsichtbarem eine Absage erteilt wird, sondern auch der spätnominalistischen Lehre von der potentia ordinata und der potentia absoluta dei (von Soosten 1990, 94)

In other words: The very 'fact' that God reveals himself in diametrical opposition to his majestic divine inviolability constitutes the opposition to theological absolutism and gives evidence that the *narrative structure* of the Bible *in itself* possesses a safeguard against the absolutistic features which Blumenberg ascribes to Christianity *qua* dogma. Following Paul Ricoeur's Biblical hermeneutics, von Soosten argues that the Biblical parables *dis-orientates in order to re-orientate* (von Soosten 1990, 95), and that the *proleptic* eschatology (as opposed to apocalyptic eschatology) of the parables display a room of new possibilities in a future which is not simply an extrapolation of the present, but one which must be understood as a *mimetic praxis* along the lines of Ricoeur: "le faire narratif re-signifie le monde dans sa dimension temporelle" (Ricoeur 1983, 152). Instead of holding onto the opposition between myth and dogma, one should rather speak of a kind of *work on the narrative of dogma*: "das wäre schließlich jene mimetische Praxis, in der nicht das Immergleiche wiederkehrt, sondern das jeweils Neue zur Darstellung gelangt" (von Soosten 1990, 97).

Even though Blumenberg's sharp opposition between myth and dogma appears rather dogmatic in itself, it does not change the fact that Blumenberg's after-metaphysical work of memory also constitutes a *work on dogma* (Cf. Stoellger 2000, 393). When Kierkegaard understands 'the real repetition' (*den egentlige Gjentagelse*) as a forward-turned remembrance (Kierkegaard 1843a, 115), which must be distinguished from memory as a backward-turned repetition of that which has been, he is in a sense voicing a central aspect of Blumenberg's work of memory: Memory is not merely a repetition of that which has been – it is not merely backward-turned; it is also forward-turned since it activates new potentials in the past, thereby confronting us with what Ricoeur has called "le choc du possible" (Ricoeur 1983, 150). Formulated differently: Blumenberg's work of memory is not only a backward-turned repetition of that which has been but also

an activating of that which *could have been*. As such it is a forward-turned work of memory. This will hopefully become clearer in the following where we examine Blumenberg's reading of Nietzsche's idea of the 'death of God'.

Before we do so, I would like to make a critical point which von Soosten overlooks. For some reason Blumenberg does not seem to pay much attention to the *problem of Trinity*. Apparently, he sees such argumentative triads as suspicious because they awaken an expectation of rationality "which they do not possess" (Cf. ZdS 239-240). Despite his thorough acquaintance with Augustine and Kant, both central exponents of triadic processes of thought, Blumenberg seems to maintain that Trinity is unfortunately caught in the dilemma between myth and dogma: "The dilemma of the history of Christian dogma lies in its having to define a Trinitarian God from whom the plurality of which no license to myth is allowed to follow" (WM 260/AM 290). Again, the claim to dogmatic rationality is marked by a "pure exclusion of any narrative license", and rather than opening up new room for questions and variations, such dogmatic answers only function as "a prelude to the non-admission of further questions" (WM 258/AM 288). For Blumenberg, Trinity is a (dogmatic) answer designed to rule out any further questions. This resistance to Trinitarian models of reflection is all the more surprising when we consider Blumenberg's sympathy with Cusanus. According to Cusanus, God is *one* only through his *inner dynamic triadic structure* (Sløk 1974, 76; Cf. Sandbeck 2007). God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In Cusanus, at least, the Trinitarian hypostases are not merely "processes of pure inwardness" (WM 260/AM 290) but constitute the necessary dialectics between the unfolding (*explicatio*) and folding together (*complicatio*) of divine nature; the Trinitarian unity of God's self-expression. It is rather astounding that Blumenberg gives no serious consideration to the intratrinitarian dimensions of Christian dogmatics. Could it not be that it is exactly the dynamic Trinitarian structure which offers a Christian-theological model for the 'narrative license' which Blumenberg is searching for? That God "loses His simplicity (*Einfalt*)" and only "recovers His self-reference and closes the circle of reflexiveness in threefoldness (*Dreifalt*)" (LM 568/LN 664) may also be taken to mean that God is *essentially* dependent on his 'otherness'. But this dependency does not have to be interpreted as a *closed* circle

of Trinitarian reflexiveness; it may also be interpreted in the direction of undecided openness, dynamic process, and movement. Between "the purely conceptual monotheism" (*begriffsreinen Monotheismus*) (WM 230/AM 255) and the "the playful reflection of the forms of worship and storytelling" (WM 137-138/AM 155) of Greek polytheism, there is the indefiniteness of Trinitarian processability. Between one and many there is three.

*Vergessene Metapher, d.h. eine Metapher,*
*bei der vergessen ist, dass es eine ist…*
F. Nietzsche[31]

**2. Nietzsche and the 'Death of God' Revised**

At first glance it would seem tempting to describe Blumenberg's critical analysis of the history of Christian theology as a relentless attempt to shed light on all the promises that it did *not* keep, thus leaving human beings behind with nothing but a reservoir of disenchanted dreams. In this light, Christianity seems to have been the main supplier of homeless hopes and unfulfilled expectations in the course of Western history: A process of remorseless disappointment which ultimately found its condensed expression in the experience of 'the death of God'. Does this mean that the past is nothing but a mausoleum of unkept promises? Is Blumenberg's main concern simply to undertake a *relief* from the 'big and all too big questions' (Cf. LM 48/LN 59) of Christian theology in order to eventually break free of the metaphysical questions of tradition? Such an interpretation is too one-sided. The past is not only what has been and will never come back; it also dwells in the memory of what could have been. Bringing the unfolded possibilities of the past back to life indicates, as we have seen, the underlying framework of interpretation in Blumenberg's metaphorology. Thus, Blumen-

[31] F. Nietzsche: *Nachgelassene Fragmente*, (Sommer 1872-Anfang 1873) in: *Kritische Studienausgabe*, Bd. 7 (Hrsg. Colli, G. et. al.), (Walter de Gruyter: Berlin), p. 492 (19 [229]).

berg's metaphorology can be regarded as an attempt to open up new possibilities for the deployment of the metaphor that is 'God'.

### 2.1 The Death of God - Nietzsche

The meaning of the expression 'the death of God' is anything but self-evident. This expression is seductive in its apparent simplicity, an appearance which threatens to disguise its ambiguity and ambivalence. The origin of this famous phrase is (at least) twofold: Born of a dialectical relationship between Christian metaphysics and its modern secular critique (Jüngel 1977, 61). Even though these two dimensions are closely intertwined and thus serve to complement each other, a distinction is clearly required: 'The death of God' oscillates between a *philosophical* and a *theological* dimensions of meaning which need to be distinguished but cannot be entirely separated. Which God does Nietzsche pronounce dead? Nietzsche knew very well that the expression 'God is dead' was part of a highly significant theological tradition. Even for the average Christian devotee, never mind the philosopher, there is a sense in which there is nothing too surprising about the claim that 'God is dead'. As Peter Sloterdijk has observed, the expression 'God is dead' contains nothing new to a Christian listener. What is new in Nietzsche is not that the 'madman' *(der Tolle Mensch*) speaks about the death of God but rather that he does *not* speak about his resurrection:

> 'Gott is todt' – dieser Satz enthält für Christen nichts Neues, wenn man bedenkt, dass sie ihn seit jeher in ihren Karsamtagsdepression meditiert haben; mit dem Folgesatz jedoch: 'Gott bleibt todt', meldet sich eine neue gegenösterliche Härte an, von der nicht zu erkennen ist, wie sie ins Leben der Hörer integriert werden könnte (Sloterdijk 2001, 586)

That God *stays* dead – theologically speaking: That no resurrection takes place – also becomes the speculative point of departure for Blumenberg's considerations in *Matthäuspassion*. The distinction between the theological and the philosophical meaning of the expression 'the death of God' also forms the more or less un-

spoken backdrop to Nietzsche's reflections. To Nietzsche (as well as to Hegel) the 'death of God' carries both an *epochal* signature and expresses a specific *Christian* event. In Heidegger's interpretation, Nietzsche's reference to the 'death of God' is seen as the 'destiny' (*Geschick*) of more than two thousand years of philosophy, condensed in the experience that the super-sensual has lost its 'operative force' (*die übersinnliche Welt ist ohne wirkende Kraft*) (Heidegger 1943, 213; 217). Moreover, the metaphysical meaning of Nietzsche's words is that *all* reference to super-sensual ideals, all super-sensual values have lost their power. They are dead: "Der übersinnliche Grund der übersinnlichen Welt ist, als die wirksame Wirklichkeit alles Wirklichen gedacht, unwirklich geworden" (Heidegger 1943, 254). Whether or not this compressed interpretation is justified is, of course, open to debate. More specifically, can Nietzsche's nihilism simply be identified with him taking leave of the idea of God *en bloc*?

Nietzsche's main concern was to show how Christianity had to undermine itself, thereby bringing about its own conclusive breakdown. Christianity's unbending 'will to truth' (*Wille zur Wahrheit*) has eventually revealed itself as the greatest and most deceitful of all illusions. In this same vein, Christianity has exposed itself as a symptom of its own disease: "das Christentum verspricht alles, aber *hält nichts*" (Nietzsche 1895, 1203-1204). That Christianity promises everything but keeps nothing means *both* that Christianity does not keep what it promises *and* that the only thing that it actually keeps is nothing (*nihil*). That is why Christianity inevitably reveals its own foundation as *nihilistic*, i.e. as a desire for nothing. The very root of Christianity's *an-nihilation* thereby appears as the result of a process of *self-annihilation*. Hence, 'the death of God' is nothing but the necessary result of Christianity's inherent tendency to unmask (and thus dissolve) itself. Atheism *is* the very result of Christianity's inherent will to truth: "Man sieht, *was* eigentlich über den christlichen Gott gesiegt hat: die christliche Moralität selbst, der immer strenger genommene Begriff der Wahrhaftigkeit (…)" (Nietzsche 1882, 227). This self-annihilation leaves a gaping emptiness – what Nietzsche refers to as *nihilism*. Nihilism signifies the will to nothing. The proposition that Nietzsche is a 'nihilist' is, however, based on a rather unfortunate confusion of ideas: A physician who makes the diagnosis 'blood poisoning'

does not himself suffer from it (though of course he *can*). In the same way Nietzsche's diagnosis of Christianity as nihilistic does not reflect Nietzsche's own contamination with nihilism. On the contrary: Nietzsche's declared goal is to *overcome* nihilism. In this process, the 'death of God' constitutes the main condition for the creation of new vigorous values. But Nietzsche is well aware of the difficulties related to this task. Christianity's obdurate will to truth is, in fact, nothing (!) but a will to nothing (*Willen zum Nichts*), related, as it were, to man's inability to live without metaphysical security: "lieber will noch der Mensch *das Nichts*, als er *nicht wollen*…" (Nietzsche 1887, 900). Blumenberg's own variations of the 'death of God' find their speculative point of departure in these considerations:

> Als Nietzsche vom "Tode Gottes" sprach, griff er – im Gegensatz zum Atheismus des 19. Jahrhunderts, der seinerseits der kategorischen Dogmatik eine dogmatische Negation entgegenstellte – auf Form des Mythos zurück (…) Nietzsche hat die Theologie nicht einfach negiert, er hat sie transformiert, indem er Gott statt einer Attribute *eine* Geschichte gab, deren Ende ihre Pointe ist (WbW 351-352)

That Nietzsche gave God a story – where the end was this story's chief meaning – can very well be said to be the point of departure in Blumenberg's own considerations. In the article discussed earlier, one can find a number of theological inlets which are radicalized and varied in Blumenberg's *Matthäuspassion*. Nietzsche's reflections on the 'death of God' do not just possess relevance to us because they form the background for Blumenberg's variations; Nietzsche also conveys an idea of *active forgetfulness* which may find direct application to the question of God. Let us therefore recall the question raised in the prologue of the present dissertation: Might it be that even Nietzsche has difficulties remembering to forget God?

*Something like that,*
*once it had been heard,*
*could not be forgotten (…)"*
(WM 154/AM 171)

## 2.2 Between Active Forgetfulness and Involuntary Remembrance

Nietzsche, to be sure, valued active forgetfulness (*aktiven Vergesslichkeit*) because of its vital power to break away from a passive "Nicht-wieder-los-werden-können" (Nietzsche 1887, 800). Nietzsche thus speaks about forgetting being a useful power (and not just a tard *vis inertia*), a manifestation of "*strong* health" (Nietzsche 1887, 799) since it enables us to create space for something new and allows new values to come to life. In *The Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life* (1874) Nietzsche introduces his famous idea about the 'plastic power' (*plastiche Kraft*) of forgetting. Nietzsche probably adopted this idea of plasticity from Jakob Burckhardt who, in his book *Die Kultur der Renaissance in Italien* (1860), writes about the renaissance culture and its capability to re-establish "jede Störung der innere Harmonie" (Figal 1999, 52-53) through the integrative power of cultural plasticity. Nietzsche confronts forgetting and remembrance and claims that whereas it is possible to live almost without any remembrance, the same does not go for forgetting: "Also: es ist möglich, fast ohne Erinnerung zu leben, ja glücklich zu leben, wie das Tier zeigt; es ist aber ganz und gar unmöglich, ohne Vergessen überhaupt zu *leben*" (Nietzsche 1874, 213). According to Nietzsche forgetting represents a genuine force or power (*Kraft*) and should not be understood as a regrettable inability or deficit (as we are used to thinking). What does Nietzsche mean by this talk of the 'power to forget'? He defines it in the following way:

> (…) ich meine jene Kraft, aus sich heraus eigenartig zu wachsen, Vergangenheit und Fremdes umzubilden und einzuverleiben, Wunden auszuheilen, Verlorenes zu ersetzen, zerbrochene Formen aus sich nachzuformen (Nietzsche 1874, 213)

The important thing to Nietzsche is that forgetting represents a human strength whose inherent plastic power (*innewohnende plastische Kraft*) (Nietzsche 1874, 230) enables us to transform, reshape, and bring to life new potentials in the past's fossilized patterns of thought. In fact, forgetting is the real counterforce

since it – unlike memory – does not take place involuntarily. Forgetting thus becomes "das Vermögen, dem irritierenden Geschehen des Erinnerns entgegenzutreten" (Figal 1999, 57). Forgetting – not remembrance – is the real power of integration. It is nonetheless striking that Nietzsche refers to forgetting as a *divine art* and explicitly doubts whether it is in the power of human beings to really forget: "Perhaps man cannot forget anything", the young Nietzsche writes (LM 69/LN 80). There seem to be reason to doubt whether active forgetfulness can indeed be applied to the course of history. Why is that? Because that which constitutes the living underground of history seems to be questions. And questions bear, as we have seen, a peculiar pre-systematic or even non-discursive character: Questions are not simply true or false. Rather, questions are a matter of expectations. And expectations are not simply removed by rational procedures. Even the disappointment that a certain expectation has not been met does not necessary mean that the particular expectation can simply be given up or dismissed.

Once human beings began to know so "amazingly much about God", as the young Hegel wrote (Hegel 1795/1796, 211) even atheism "was only possible insofar as it was able to fill again the space laid claim to by what it negated" (*war selbst ein Atheismus (…) nur möglich, sofern sie das Anspruchsvolumen ihrer Negate wieder aufzufüllen vermochten*) (LM 69/LN 79). Nietzsche's famous words in *Götzen-Dämmerung* – that it is unlikely that we will get rid of God as long as we still have faith in grammar (Cf. Nietzsche 1889, 960) – can be read as a radicalisation of this train of thought since they solidify the assumption that God is not something effortlessly lost to memory. In fact, God is nothing – i.e. no *thing* – at all. If God is thought of as a thing he becomes nothing (*nihil*). That is again, I think, the underlying focus of reflection and at the same time the fundamental ambiguity of Nietzsche's diagnosis of modernity as nihilistic: That both the belief in something (God) that is in fact nothing *and* the belief that God should be understood as a thing – both lead to no-thing (*nihil*), i.e. to nihilism. Scientific atheism often presupposes a crude metaphysical realism. It interprets God within the stout framework of palpability, making God into some-thing "present-at-hand" (*Vorhanden*) or "Dingfest" (Adorno 1966, 392). Nietzsche's critique

of religion is, however, of a much more subtle nature than this kind of scientific atheism, since it touches on the linguistic parallels to God. In other words: Can we abolish grammar without presupposing it?

*Wann werden uns alle*
*diese Schatten Gottes*
*nicht mehr verdunkeln?*
F. Nietzsche[32]

### 2.3 In the Shadows of God

To relinquish grammar (or as Nietzsche puts it, "die Volksmetaphysik") that tie us to our understanding of the world and ourselves is not exactly an easy task. If the reality of God really is as pervasive and irremovable as the unspoken grammar behind our sentences, the aspiration to conclusively break away from this old token (however mendacious it may be) seems to suggest a doomed enterprise. Nietzsche himself seemed to doubt that taking leave of God was ever going to be easy, like a matter of simple decision making. And history would seem to suggest that Nietzsche's lack of confidence in the traceless disappearance of God was entirely justified. My claim is not, however, that Nietzsche naively holds on to God even though he claims the opposite. My claim is that Nietzsche's understanding of 'the death of God' is more ambiguous than it is sometimes tacitly presumed. This finds support in the metaphorical background of Nietzsche's text, *The Gay Science* (*Die Fröhliche Wissenchaft*, 1882), where Nietzsche for the first time declares that 'God is dead' (Nietzsche 1882, 115).

Here the talk about the 'death of God' does not carry the tone of triumph that was later attached to it. Rather, the heading of the preceding chapter, 'New Fights' (*Neu Kämpfe*) is heard in the background: The 'death of God' is a challenge that invites a vigorous response. It is not something that can be easily overcome, and it is not a fight that has already been won. Nietzsche gives no credence to the idea that a dead God equals a forgotten one. He thus speaks

[32] F. Nietzsche: *Die Fröhliche Wissenschaft* (1882) in: *Werke in drei Bände*, Bd. II, (Hrsg. Karl Schlechta (1956)), (Lizenzausgabe für die Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft: Darmstadt 1997), p. 116.

about the long, dark shadows of God which still clouds our perspective ("Wann werden uns alle diese Schatten Gottes nicht mehr verdunkeln?") (Nietzsche 1882, 116) and speculates that it could take a millennia for these ghostly shadows to be exorcised from the cavernous minds of human beings. The Madman, announcing the terrible news of the 'death of God', is left alarmingly unnoticed by the crowd. Nobody seems to grasp anything. Unable to understand the far-reaching consequences and effects of this dreadful event, the crowd returns to their convenient cultural caves of *disguised* Christian belief. And that is the paradox: The crowd's apathetic indifference towards 'the death of God' serves as the silent seal of the Christian God's (however tacit and disguised) irrepressibility. The fact that the crowd does not react at all to the Madman proclaiming the death of God epitomises the resistance of the Christian-Platonic legacy to such assaults: God cannot easily be consigned to eternal oblivion. Despite his death we still find ourselves in the long-lasting shades of God. The residual powers of the Christian-Platonic God dwell silently in the cultural grammar of late-modernity.

In his major work, *Höhlenausgänge* (1989), Blumenberg scrutinizes the long and complex history of transformation of the absolute metaphor of the cave (*Höhle*). The "metaphor of the cave" (H 18) displays the historical transformation of pre-systematic and non-discursive attitudes towards the world. It depicts the longings, hopes, demands and expectations, fears and disappointments of human beings throughout Western history – all condensed in the guiding idea of emancipation. Nietzsche's radical attempt to overcome the lethal legacy of Plato implies, as Blumenberg observes, that the exposure of the shades (*die Enttarnung der Schatten*) itself becomes meaningless (H 613). Nietzsche's suspension of the difference between 'being' (*Sein*) and 'appearance' (*Erscheinung*) also dissolves the metaphorical background level of light and darkness contained in Plato's allegory of the cave. Nietzsche's Zarahustra therefore also functions as a burlesque parody of Plato's cave. Moreover, Zarathustra's anti-Platonic suspension of the background metaphorics between light and dark, 'entrances' and 'exits' of the cave are transformed, paradoxically, into new dualism which lays claim not to be a Platonic one any longer:

> Während jeder der platonischen Schatten identifizierbar die Stelle einer Realität einnimmt, die er abbildet und ersetzt, hat die ästhetische Lüge ihre Harmlosigkeit daraus, dass es die entsprechende Wahrheit nicht gibt, die sie verdrängt. An der Stelle, die sie besetzt, gab es zuvor nichts (…) Wenn Zarathustra am Ende strahlend aus der Höhle hervortritt, so auch mit erkennbarer Anspielung auf die platonische Schatten, die er hinter sich gelassen hat. Allerdings sind es nicht mehr die Schatten der Dinge, sondern der eine Schatten Zarathustras selbst, der Schatten des toten Gottes (H 616-617)

The biblical motifs adopted by Nietzsche are clear enough. One significant motif in *Zarathustra*, that mirrors the difficulties of a definitive leave-taking with the vanquished (namely God), is found in Nietzsche's satirical transformation of the last supper (H 620). Even though there is an urgent need to leave God behind, and to immunise ourselves against his re-appearance, the question is whether there is such a thing as a conclusive overcoming of God: "Wiederholung ist nötig, weil es die Endgültigkeit des Überwundenen nicht gibt" (H 621). It is well-known that the empty place, which was left vacant by Nietzsche's dead God, was supposed to be followed by the superhuman (*der Übermensch*): "Gott starb: nun wollen *wir* – dass der Übermensch lebe" (Nietzsche 1883, 523), Nietzsche writes in *Also Sprach Zarathustra*. The successor of God, the heir of the dethroned God, is the *Übermensch*. The breakdown of God left a whirl of empty places behind, thereby leaving it up to man to reoccupy these vacant places. The question which immediately presents itself is: Does this idea of the superhuman contain any residue of plausibility? Blumenberg's answer to this question is almost wholly negative. In an article on Kant from 1954 – written only ten years after the horrors of the holocaust – he calls attention to the fact that what according to Nietzsche was supposed to be a fruitful (*fruchtbar*) heir had turned out to be a frightful (*furchtbar*) one "wie die Erfahrung mit einer der Omnipotenz sich zuneigende Macht des Menschen alsbald lernen sollte" (KF 554). In the end, the task of filling the vacant place of the omnipotent God seemed not only to have been difficult – which was to be expected – but disastrous.

The fundamental *Leitvorstellung* which Blumenberg seems to trace to Nietzsche could then be interpreted as follows: God is dead – but the shadow of his corpse still bears down on us. Also the shadows of God must be overcome, surmounted. Blumenberg thus speaks about the "hard-headedness of the shadows" (*die Hartnäckigheit der Schatten*) (H 632): The main point here seems to be that the death of God is not simply a *fait accompli*, an accomplished fact, since his shadows also needs to be defeated. Does this suggest that the presumption that there is such a thing as a conclusive break with God is in fact nothing but *fata morgana*? Or to express the matter differently: May it be that God is not voluntarily forgettable but rather the result of a kind of *involuntary remembrance*?

**2.4 "And suddenly the memory returns…"**

"And suddenly the memory returns", Marcel Proust writes in his legendary work, *À la recherche du temp perdu*. Proust's famous novel displays a remarkable thematic affinity to the specific modern problem of formulating a coherent 'concept of reality' (*Wirklichkeitsbegriff*) (Cf. H 13-19). It does so by thematising the problem of beginning through the lens of memory. Reality is, according to Proust, the result of a certain relation between sensation and remembrance, between presence and past: "Une heure n'est pas une heure (…) Ce que nous appellons la réalite est un certain rapport entre ces sensations et ces souvenirs qui nous entourent simultanément" (Proust 1913 (IV), 467). "Je m'endors" (Proust 1913, (I), 3) – "I put myself to sleep", the first line of direct seemingly harmlessly declares. The grammar of this formulation is, however, seductive. We never put ourselves to sleep, just as we never wake ourselves up. The beginning of Proust's novel conceals a paradox that might all too easily be passed over in silence. The beginning of the novel maintains that we can have no beginning and yet we are nonetheless unable to give up such an idea. The novel reflects its own impossibility; it mirrors its self-contained paradox: "Der Roman hat sein Thema gefunden eben dadurch, dass er seinen Anfang genommen hat" (H 15). Proust's novel begins with the beginning of a brand new day, embodied in the narrator's para-

doxical opening line: *Je m'endors*. This signals that the problem or sense of reality (*Wirklichkeitsbewusstsein*) functions as the (implicit) main theme of the novel. How is the difference between dream and reality realised? What status has our memory? Which kind of reality is contained in our memories – and eventually: What *is* reality? These questions seem to be the unspoken fields of reflection in Proust's novel.

*Nous sommes venus tard en tout*, Voltaire writes (Cf. H 19, note 3; LW 218), thereby unwittingly giving expression to a fundamental modern hermeneutical insight – namely that we never begin with the beginning, but have always-already begun. Voltaire summons us to regain the lost time (*regagnons le temps perdu*), thus giving voice to an inescapable dilemma of human time experience: On the one hand, time is always-already lost, and we are constantly confronted with the painful passing of time; on the other hand, this harsh fact is exactly what makes it so important to regain it. However paradoxical it may seem: Memory gains importance to the same extent that it makes us realise that we cannot any longer have or be what we remember: "Wir leben im Masse von der Erinnerung, wie wir die aktuelle Chance, das Erinnerte noch einmal zu sein, verlieren" (EmS 44). Memory compensates for the absence of the remembered. But by doing so it at the same time becomes a *radical memento* of the decisive irretrievability of the remembered. In the memory of the past, the past not only receives a re-presence but also discloses itself as something indelibly past. Memory keeps the past alive; it arouses the dimensions that lie dormant below the surface of the present. And yet by reviving the past, memory inevitably confronts us with its irretrievable nature because it makes us realise the past is something genuinely unrecoverable.

Proust's chain of memories seems to be of an opposite nature to the Nietzschean idea of an actively controlled forgetting determined, as it is, by a fundamentally involuntary and almost forced spontaneity. The celebrated passage displaying this phenomenon of involuntary remembrance is, of course, the passage in which the character Marcel dips his madeleine pastry into a cup of tea and suddenly finds himself overwhelmed by pleasure: "Un plaisir délicieux m'avait envahi, isolé, sans la notion de sa cause (…) D'où avait pu me venir cette

puissante joie? (Proust 1913 (I), 44). Proust's novel is guided by the insight into the involuntary nature of remembrance (*mémoire involtaire*) that withdraws itself from the mastery of any calculated or intended planning. It is the opposite of a voluntary memory (*mémoire volontaire*). Here any idea of a forced forgetting is replaced by an involuntary experience of truth that finds its means in memory, in the unconscious work of memory (Jauss 1982, 312; Cf. 152ff). Involuntary remembrance is characterised by a passive 'being-remembered-by' something else: "Etwas erinnert mich an sich selbst" (Theunissen 1987, 313). This is the reason why Nietzsche considers *forgetting* (and not remembrance) the real covetable human power: Whereas remembrance takes place involuntarily, against our *will*, forgetfulness is vigorously active and therefore suggests strength of character, power to "make room for new things" (Nietzsche 1887, 799). Hence, the *failure* to forget is identical with an inactive subject who is deprived of strength and activity, who is burdened with the inertia his memories force on him. Memories paralyse action, whereas forgetting enables life – *basta*! Perhaps not surprisingly Nietzsche's position is more complicated and convoluted than these sparse considerations seem to suggest. There namely seems to be *different kinds* of memory as well as forgetfulness at play in Nietzsche. In the passage quoted above, Nietzsche distinguishes between a *passive* "Nicht-wieder-los-werden-*können*" and an *active* "Nicht-wieder-los-werden-*wollen*" (Nietzsche 1887, 800, my italics). Whereas the former is a sign of re-active *inability*, the latter constitutes an active *will* understood as "ein Fort-und-fort-wollen des einmal Gewollten, ein eigentliches *Gedächtnis des Willens*" (Nietzsche 1887, 800). There is, in other words, not just a power of forgetting but also a 'real memory of the will' in Nietzsche.[33] This suggests a more refined and subtle understanding of the relation between memory and forgetting than the un-dialectical and one-sided model presented might suggest. Despite the complexities in Nietzsche's view on memory and forgetting, it does seem obvious that *involuntary* remembrance (exactly because it is

[33] In a book on Nietzsche which has yet to be published, Peter Bornedal distinguishes between two forms of forgetfulness and two forms of memory attached respectively to 'the slave' and 'the master'. I am thankful to Carsten Pallesen for enabling me to read chapter 5 ("The Meaning of Master, Slave, and Priest") of Bornedal's unpublished manuscript.

something not-willed) falls into the category which Nietzsche condemns as paralysing in its passivity.

The question is, however, if involuntary remembrance is necessarily to be understood as a kind of heteronomously imprinted weakness. According to Michael Theunissen, Proust's involuntary remembrance should rather be understood as a 'catching up on', not simply a 're-enacting' perception (*eine nachgeholte, nicht wiederholte Wahrnehmung*). In fact, involuntary remembrance disintegrates the traditional distinction between 'perception' *(Wahrnehmung*) and 'recollection' *(Wiedererinnerung*) understood as the mere re-production of a past perception. Proust's understanding of involuntary remembrance itself constitutes a kind of perception because it is a perception of that which was not previously perceived (*des einst nicht Wahrgenommenen*) and thus a genuinely *productive* work. Involuntary remembrance is, in the almost untranslatable words of Theunissen, 'a life of the not-lived life' (*ein Leben nicht gelebten Lebens*) (Theunissen 1987, 313). Moreover, Theunissen sees in Proust's understanding of involuntary remembrance a remembrance of essence (*Wesen*) (I return to this peculiar idea of *Er-Innern* in my paragraph on Hegel):

> Die Deutsche Sprache hilft uns, seinen (i.e. Proust's, UHR) Gedanken nachzuvollziehen, indem sie das eigentümliche Sein, das wir 'Wesen' nennen, mit dem Gewesensein verbindet: Wesen ist aufbewahrtes, im wörtlichen Sinne er-innertes, innerlich gewordenes Sein (Theunissen 1987, 313)

This particular conception of remembrance thus involves bringing into existence something not hitherto seen or known, something which transcends my own will and intentions. And perhaps even: Involuntary remembrance implies giving substance to the unfulfilled possibilities of the past. Whereas Nietzsche spoke about the plastic power of forgetting, we are here confronted with an idea of (involuntary) remembrance which may perhaps be described using the metaphor 'plasticity': Being confronted with something which reaches beyond my self-intended will and thus *in itself* displays a plastic power to transform, change and modify *me* by 'making room for new things', as Nietzsche said. In this light

'the plasticity of memory' may well be understood in its *double form*: – partly as something which *gives form to something*, partly as something which *receives its form from something*. The plasticity of memory not only *in-forms* what is being remembered; it is also *in-formed* by what is remembered.

## 3. Blumenberg's Rethinking of the Death of God

In the following section we turn to Blumenberg's variations on the theme of 'the death of God'. These variations do find themselves in proximity to Nietzschean figures of thought. First, however, a few thoughts on the relation between death and boredom.

### 3.1 The Absolutism of Boredom

In his *Antichrist* (written in 1888 but not published until 1894) Nietzsche, the great polemicist, spoke about the "erbarmungswürdige Gott des christlichen Monotono-Theismus" (Nietzsche 1895, 1179): A God who is characterised by a stationary invariability and therefore written off as irksome in his tediousness. "Zwei Jahrtausende beinahe und seitdem keinen einziger neuer Gott!" Nietzsche laments (Ibid 1178), and thereby seems to express his yawning disappointment at the sterility and poverty of human imagination. This type of reflection can also be found in Blumenberg. Blumenberg thus makes the following note about the almighty and eternal God of Christianity:

> Gott ist allmächtig, allwissend und völlig unbedürftig aller ihm äußeren Gegenstände. Bedeutet nun, dass er allwissend ist, dass er *überhaupt etwas* wissen will? Muss nicht sein Zustand der Unbedürftigkeit so aufgefasst werden, dass er keinerlei Interesse an irgend etwas hat, was er nicht selbst ist? (ZdS 247)

Why should a God without interests and needs want anything what so ever? Is not God's alleged "unmoved state" (*Unbewegtheit*) the very epitome "of his lack of interest in the world" (WM 29/AM 36)? God as the Christian version of Aristotle's 'unmoved mover' appears in this light to be a God who is congealed in

dogmatic sterility and unalterable apathy. "I am that I am" (Exodus 3:14) a well-known formulation goes, which in Nietzsche's eyes becomes the formula for the disastrous disease of wanting to establish oneself in eternal self-identity (Cf. LM 105/LN 116). Blumenberg seems to interpret Nietzsche's words as a sort of re-mythicization of theological doctrines (WM 29/AM 36). My claim would be that Blumenberg here finds a paradigm for some of his own reflections. In Nietzsche's attempt to employ elementary myths as instruments of philosophy and undertake "daring variants of sanctioned myths" (WM 176/AM 194), Blumenberg's own theological considerations find their point of attachment. In the *Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, Blumenberg described how the crisis-laden self-dissolution of the Middle Ages was connected to a particular conceptualisation of God. 'Theological absolutism' was Blumenberg's title for a historically situated cluster of problems which eventually led to a collapse of medieval theological systems. The more systematic implications of the idea of theological absolutism have also been voiced at different places by Blumenberg. The idea of an omnipotent God seems to entail a number of paradoxes which are related to the idea of *absolute subjectivity*:

> Was ein Gott ist, ist als Gegentypus menschlicher Bedürftigkeit erdacht: einer, der alles haben kann, was er will, von dem man sich aber nicht vorstellen kann, dass er etwas wollen könnte. Eben darin liegt das Problem: Weshalb sollte einer etwas wollen, der alles kann, nur um zu haben, dessen er nicht bedarf? Das Dilemma der Reinheit zeichnet sich am Präparat ab (ZdS 248-249)

The 'dilemma of purity' can thus be described in the abstract formula: The higher degree of *purification*, the lower degree of *motivation* (ZdS 256). God conceived as absolute subjectivity would imply a paradox, since it would mean the suspension of intentionality which constitutes the fundamental structure of *any* kind of consciousness. Intentionality not only means that consciousness is directed at something different from itself but also that consciousness can be conceived *neither* as empty *nor* as timeless (ZdS 261). One could also translate the problem of purity into a speculative question about temporality: "Vermag ein

Gott sich überhaupt auf irgend etwas außer sich einzulassen, da er sich doch unendlich viel Zeit damit lassen könnte, es noch zu tun?“ (LW 297). It is considerations like these which seem to lie behind Blumenberg's attempt to prepare the ground for an alternative way of conceiving God, an alternative which may be said to have its inspirational background in Nietzsche. Moreover, the Nietzchean idea of 're-occupying' given (*vorgegebenen*) theological and mythological configurations (Cf. WM 176/AM 195) seems to form the inspirational background for Blumenberg's own attempt to vary the myth of paradise.

In *Either/Or*, Søren Kierkegaard remarks that "idleness (*Lediggang*) is the root of all evil" (Kierkegaard 1843b, 266). May this observation be applied to God too? Was evil perhaps nothing but an instance of God's own boredom? In Nietzsche, Blumenberg finds the idea that it was God himself who had sneaked into the Garden of Eden, and placed himself under the tree of wisdom, masked as a snake in order to regain his strength. In *Ecce Homo* Nietzsche thus writes:

> Theologisch geredet – man höre gut zu, denn ich rede selten als Theologe – war es Gott selber, der sich als Schlange am Ende seines Tagewerks unter den Baum der Erkenntnis legte: er erholte sich so davon, Gott zu sein… Er hatte alles zu schön gemacht…Der Teufel ist bloß der Müßiggang Gottes an jedem siebten Tage…(Nietzsche 1908, 1142)[34]

Werner Thiede has argued that, in this very passage, Nietzsche reveals himself as a *theologian* who speaks about God "*jenseits* des Gegensatzes von Gut und Böse" (Thiede 2001, 475, my italics). His claim is, in short, that Nietzsche the anti-metaphysician undertakes an attempt to think God *beyond* the dualistic op-

[34] *Ecce Homo* was published posthumously in 1908. It belongs to a group of Nietzsche's works which were subject to significant manipulation by his sister, Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche. In a footnote Blumenberg wonders whether the editor really produced an accurate reading in the 1908 edition, in which the texts reads "on *every* seventh day" (an *jedem* siebten Tag) instead of the philosophically less demanding "on *that* seventh day" (an *jenem* siebten Tag). "After all, is it not only the latter which is in question here?", asks Blumenberg, dryly (Cf. WM 649/AM 195).

position between 'good' and 'evil' by letting these two *opposite* dimensions *coincide* in a kind of mythical (and quasi-Cusan?) idea of *coincidentia oppositorum* (476). God thereby becomes a purely immanent, anti-dualistic *circulus vitiosus*: God as "fehlerhafter Kreislauf (…) als 'ein-Gott-Teufelkreis' – aber eben als *deus*, ganz positive als Gott: das ist die Essenz von Nietzsches Theologie" (477). Nietzsche's thinking thereby opens up the way for a consequent, but "schwer durchschaubare Schlangen-Theologie" (481). Nietzsche's attempt is not, Thiede argues, to simply negate God *as such* but rather to make room for a new God beyond the traditional opposition between good and evil, being and appearance (488). Does God metamorphise here into the snake, as if in protest against the dogmatisation of Christian theology? The dogmatic God of Christianity is, in Nietzsche's speculative variation, subjected to a "remythicisation" (WM 29/AM 36).

Nietzsche had proclaimed music to be an effective antidote to boredom (Cf. BM 712). In Blumenberg's thought, a similar sympathy for the musical variation and its suggestive power can be found. Moreover, Blumenberg seems to affiliate himself with the (Nietzschean) idea that music – in particular the tones of Bach – forms the basis of an alternative *intonation* of the theological material of reflection. This becomes particularly evident in Johann Sebastian Bach's celebrated composition from 1729, which constitutes the explicit background for Blumenberg's variations on 'the death of God' hypothesis.[35] It could seem that Blumen-

[35] In *Matthäuspassion* one of the chapter headings reads: "Nietzsche als Hörer der Matthäuspassion gedacht" (M 68ff). This title's 'hypothetical' character need not remain hypothetical. Werner Stegmaier has pointed out that the young Nietzsche – in a letter from the 30th of April 1870 – makes the following observation: "In dieser Woche habe ich *dreimal* die Matthäuspassion des göttlichen Bachs gehört, jedesmal mit demselben Gefühl der unermesslichen Verwunderung. Wer das Christenthum völlig verlernt hat, der hört hier wirklich das Evangelium; es ist dies die Verneinung des Willens, ohne die Erinnerung an die Askesis" (Stegmaier 1992, 356f (note 170)). That Nietzsche's glorification of Bach's music represents the implicit background of inspiration behind Blumenberg's own variations is not primarily an observation about intellectual biography; Blumenberg's already mentioned sympathy for myth (as opposed to dogma) is based on myth's proximity to a free musical variation which moves on the very limit of the recognisable. By transposing the

berg, in Bach's musical composition, locates the tenor of his own 'theology' (Cf. M 30). Again, the question of sin may be seen as the point of departure.

In Blumenberg's reading of this passage, Nietzsche's daring variant of the myth of paradise likewise constitutes the point of departure for the advance of a hypothesis about how evil is *inherently* present in Creation itself, namely as God's "satiety with the good that he has made, because he sees that it cannot have any future, any history" (WM 177/AM 195). Paradise thus holds an unbearable "stationary finality and completeness", it denotes the "negation of history, the epitome of a god's boredom" (Ibid). The temptation in Paradise was, Blumenberg argues with Nietzsche, God's trick (*Kunstgriff*), his device to give his work a quality of history thereby avoiding "that the good bores him, even the good that he himself is" (WM 177/AM 196). God, in the metamorphosis of the snake, takes the role of the devil. The expulsion from Paradise thus constitutes nothing but God's "own secret wish" which results from his "boredom with the mode of domestication called Paradise" (WM 178/AM 196):

> This God did not regret having created, but he did regret the extent of a perfection that as 'Paradise' already had to be the end, the epitome of every satisfaction (*das Maß einer Volkommenheit, die als 'Paradies' schon das Ende, der Inbegriff aller Zufriedenheiten sein musste*). Sin was a trick, and the old antithesis of good and evil was only a deception from the very beginning, in Paradise – the trap (*die Falle*) in which man was to be caught because he believed that this was the secret that God was withholding from him (WM 177/AM 195-196)

The expulsion from Paradise did not take place as a result of human disobedience, but was the result of a metaphysical cynicism: God himself "takes on the role of the *diabolos*, the mischief-maker (…) He is one in all" (WM 178/AM 196). Werner Thiede's idea about Nietzsche's God *beyond* good and evil thus seems to mean: God as immanent disintegration of self-identity by means of change-

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theological material of reflection into *the conjunctive of the possible* (M 128) new horizons of meaning are opened up.

ability, metamorphosis. Blumenberg ascribes his idea of 're-occupation' to Nietzsche as an expression of remythicisation, i.e. as a daring variant of a sanctioned myth (WM 176/AM 194). Again, 're-occupation' does not signify the pure, uncontrolled imagination of *anything* but must be understood as a controlled variation of certain fundamental patterns of thought already at hand in the theological material.

It is this idea of a changeable God which Blumenberg takes up for reconsideration in *Matthäuspassion*. The idea that the God of the Old Testament *could have* combined his "superior power" with an "unconditional sympathy with man" and thereby also shown "an absolute interest in 'human interest' (*ein absolutes Interesse am 'human interest'*)" (WM 24/AM 30) is also voiced in *Work on Myth*. Here, Blumenberg's reading of Cusa as an exponent for a *possible alternative* administration of the theological material of reflection is dealt with by way of suggestion. As we have seen, the importance ascribed to Incarnation by Cusa functions (at least in Blumenberg's reading) as the point of departure for the fundamental idea that God became man not in order to repair man's bottomless sin but as a manifestation of and in corroboration with his absolute interest in man. Christianity's adoption of ancient metaphysics was, however, obstructive for thinking through this fundamental Christian idea. According to Blumenberg the obstructiveness of this central idea of Christianity thus "breaks through all the seams of the dogmatic system" (WM 24/ AM 30) simply because the idea of a "suffering Omnipotence, an Omnipotence that was ignorant of the date set for the Last Judgment, an Omnipresence that was drawn into history at a specific time and place" (WM 24-25/AM 31) is very difficult to combine with the imposed rules of pagan metaphysics. In other words, the idea central to the Incarnation, namely that of an "absolute *realism* of the commitment of divine favour to men" (WM 23/AM 30, my italics) is left 'unvoiced' by medieval theology because it had to preserve the untouchableness of divine autarky. Against *this* unchangeable God who is bricked firmly in the solidified concrete of pagan metaphysics, Blumenberg argues for the *possibility* of another God; a God who "is not unconditionally in the right and, still more importantly, cannot do everything" (WM 614/AM 666). Moreover, Blumenberg here sees the emergence of a possible

God who is not always right and who did not know what he did when he created the world (Cf. M 124). We are here confronted with the distinction between a Biblical God and a philosophical God, a distinction we've touched on a number of times already. The idea of omnipotence is not derived from the Bible: "Von einem 'höchsten Wesen' und einem 'reinen Geist' weiß die Bibel nichts (…)" (M 17). Blumenberg's metaphorological enterprise – to dismantle the self-evident and question what has become 'obvious' – is also applied to the idea of God: The distinction between the 'God of metaphysical theology' and the 'God of the Gospels' (Cf. DM 83-84) provides the resources for *another* God: Perhaps "a disguised God capable of many metamorphoses" (Cf. LM 594 /LN 698), as Blumenberg writes in a different context.

The idea that God created the world as a reaction to his potentially eternal boredom may also be expressed by means of phenomenology. Boredom may be described as 'empty intentionality' or more precisely as "Ausser-sich-sein ohne Realität" (BM 703). As we have seen, the life-world was the epitome of a world in which intentionality was rendered superfluous. The *complete* convergence between 'consciousnesses' and 'world' made intentionality thoroughly dispensable. If boredom can be understood as shrinkage (*Schwund*) of possibilities of intentionality (BM 724) – as a reduction of possibilities of being directed upon objects – then *absolute* boredom seems to find its limit value in the very idea of the life-world. Or to be more precise: Boredom is the negative function of the life-world (BM 704). Boredom is, from a phenomenological point of view, lack of intentions (*Intentionsarmut*); a situation in which nothing appears on the horizon which may catch or distract my attention. It is the complete lack of anything surprising that constitutes my intentional horizon (BM 707-708). We are not really bored *by* something. That would presuppose intentional directedness at something 'outside' of us. Boredom is rather self-related. We bore *ourselves*: "In der Langeweile wird das Selbstbewusstsein unbehaglich" (BM 705). In *Matthäuspassion* Blumenberg makes the following observation:

> Die Allmacht, sofern man sie besäße, müsste der Langeweile so nahe kommen wie das Phantastische. Wenn alles möglich ist, sind nur die

> kürzesten Wege plausibel, jede Umständlichkeit überflüssig, jede Schwierigkeit übertrieben (M 11)

Seen in this light it is tempting to ask whether God's alleged omniscience and omnipotence would imply a kind of absolutistic boredom? *Nothing* could be a surprise to a God who would always know anything anywhere without even the slightest moment of hesitation. But would not this God be thrown unendurably upon himself and thus exposed to what Kant describes as the *negative pain* of boredom?

In his *Anthropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht* (1798), Kant refers to "die drückende, ja ängstliche Beschwerlichkeit der langen Weile" (Kant 1798, 554). Blumenberg sees in Kant a connection between boredom and death (BM 720), which may be considered as part of the background to Blumenberg's re-thinking of God. In the quoted work, Kant further remarks that "die in sich wahrgenommene Leere an Empfindungen erregt ein Grauen (*horror vacui*) und gleichsam das Vorgefühl eines langsamen Todes, der für peinlicher gehalten wird, als wenn das Schicksal den Lebensfaden schnell abreißt" (Kant 1798, 554-555). The question Blumenberg seems to pose, albeit indirectly, is: Did God die because of his boredom? Was his boredom, his apathy, his constitutive "Mangel an Affektionsbereitschaft" (BM 721) the real reason for his death? Or as I would like to formulate the question: Is a God who dies not, after all, a more living one than a God who can have everything but is in need of nothing, and whose eternity means that everything can be postponed indefinitely? Again, the idea of omnipotence displays itself as a destructive feature of theology:

> Wo alles möglich ist, verliert die Personalität des Gottes ihren Sinn, wird zum Widersinn selbst (…) Es muss nicht alles gleichermaßen möglich sein, wenn Aussagen über Gott für den Menschen mehr und anderes bedeuten sollen als die Aufforderung zur Unterwerfung unter eine verblüffende Majestät (…) Also hängt die Existenz der Theologie und ihre religiöse Funktion ganz davon ab, dass das Attribut der Allmacht nicht bedeutet, es sei alles möglich (VF 130)

The relevance of this observation does not lie in a pious attempt to save theology from secular critique. Rather, its relevance reaches beyond the confined space of theology and points to decisive *anthropological* insights: If *everything* were possible, *nothing* would be of importance. Or formulated inversely: If *nothing* were impossible, *everything* would be the same. The limit value of omnipotence is indifference. One can, I think, understand these considerations as the phenomenological background behind Blumenberg's attempt to give voice to an alternative idea of God by asking once again: What happened in Paradise? (Cf. M 95)

### 3.2 Once Again: What Happened in Paradise?

"Vertreibung aus dem Paradies – wie können wir das noch verstehen?" (EmS 47), Blumenberg asks in a small text which carries the title *Die Welt hat keinen Namen*. It is well-known that God gave the very first human (Adam) the privilege of giving things names (Cf. *Gen.* 2:20). Paradise was thereby turned into a world in which there were names for everything (except, as Kierkegaard remarks in a diary entry from March 1836, for man himself (Cf. BM 781)) and where these names at the same time furnished Paradise with a fundamental familiarity (Cf. NdN 15): "All trust in the world begins with names, in connection with which stories can be told" (WM 35/AM 41). To find names for the unknown is a way of making the world reliable and familiar, of not abandoning it to pure arbitrariness. Paradise is the theological-mythological term for what has been described as the life-world (LW 35); it is a world in which there are correct names for everything. However, the Biblical myth of paradise seems to contain elements and descriptions which compromise the very idea of a life-world. Hence, even in a paradise there seems to be phenomena, constituents and conceptual components which contradict the very idea of a paradise. Blumenberg directs his attention to the internal tensions and contradictions that are attached to the idea of a Paradise.

Do not read this sentence. A condition of a fulsome understanding of a prohibition, of a boundary, is that it has already been transgressed. It is the paradox of a prohibition that in order to fully understand it, it somehow needs to be bro-

ken. Would not even a Paradise contain lines of resistance which would point to its own, inherent limits and conflicts? As Blumenberg remarks, the idea of a garden understood as an area of limited experience awakens the expectation that there must be something outside the garden. So, expulsion from Paradise – was that really necessary? Does Paradise not destroy itself anyway? (Cf. LW 74). Blumenberg gives the answer to this question himself:

> Vollkommener Einklang zwischen dem eben der Schöpferhand entsprungene Menschenwesen und seiner Gartenwelt ist denkbar, doch kaum mehr als für einen Augenblick. Ein Garten, das ist wunderbar erdacht, ist ein Areal begrenzter Erfahrung; aber an Grenzen zu stoßen, weckt und erregt den Zweifel, ob Größeres nicht jenseits der Grenze warten könnte (LW 74)

Is the demand not to eat from the Tree of Knowledge likewise nothing but the establishment of a limit that is already contained within the idea itself? Could Adam and Eve really understand what was happening when God made clear the prospect of punishment? How could they possibly understand the consequences of a transgression of the divine directives? The Garden of Eden thus seems to contain tensions in its original design. Even on paradisiacal premises there must have been experiences or constituents that would undermine the idea of a Paradise from within, drawing attention to the split between life-time and world-time. Man's fundamental experience of the indifference of the world (*die Gleichgültigkeit der Welt*) thus seems to be inherent to the idea of a Paradise, since the experience of a time utterly unresponsive to man's wishes and needs is already a key feature of the idea of a Paradise. As Blumenberg observes:

> Vier Jahre nach dem tage 0 taucht am Himmel des Paradies er ersten Fixsterne auf – *Alpha Centauri* mag Adam ihn genannt haben -, und vielleicht gab er das erste Gefühl davon, die Welt könne Vorbehalt auch in der Zeit sein. Da war ein Stück Wirklichkeit, das sich nicht um den Menschen zu kümmern schien, nicht war wie die Tiere, die er sich bei ihren Namen genannt hatte und die sich rufen ließen […] Die Welt war da gewesen, als der Mensch zum ersten Mal erwachte; sie bestand fort, als er zum ersten Mal einschlief. Sie scheint nicht nur

> Garten zu sein: Unbekümmertheit um den Menschen ist ihr wie eine Qualität eigen (LW 74-75)

What Blumenberg wishes to signal with these observations is that even a Paradise seems to be unthinkable without fundamental experiences which point to the split between life-time and world-time. Even the idea of a paradise thus seems to contain elements of disintegration which would make the very first humans aware of the indifference of the world. Therefore no expulsion was needed: "Es bedarf keiner 'Vertreibungen'" (LW 76). But why was man expelled from the Garden of Eden in the first place?

*Denn Gott kennt den Tod nicht,*
*von dem wir alle wissen*[36]
H.G.-Gadamer

**3.3 Paradise Lost**

"Adam, where are thou?" (*Gen* 3:9). Adam and Eve had hidden themselves amongst the threes of the garden because they knew they were naked and scared to be seen. But it was not from each other's eyes that they tried to escape. Right after their eyes were opened they "sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin coverings" (*Gen.* 3:7) shielding their nudity. It was the eye of God which they feared (Cf. DF 1). "Who told you that you were naked?" (*Gen.* 3:11), God asks as if he didn't already know. As Hans Robert Jauss observes, it is more than unlikely that God did not know where Adam was. Jauss sees the irony in this very first question from God to man (Jauss 1982, 378-379). Because there can be no questions, posed by an omniscient God, to which God doesn't already know the answer? But perhaps a minor alternation to this mythical text could deliver a question in genuine want of an answer, even to an omniscient God. Let us transform the actual Biblical question into a philosophical one: "Adam, are thou?" Why is this question no longer ironic or rhetorical? Because

[36] H.-G. Gadamer: "Das Rätsel der Zeit" (1975) in: *Neuere Philosophie II. Gesammelte Werke 4*, (Mohr Siebeck: Tübingen) 161-172, p. 170.

it would be the only question even an omniscient God *had* to ask. For how could an immortal God ever understand what it means to *be* a finite creature concerned with death? "Es wäre eine des absoluten Wissens würdige Frage gewesen – und zugleich die der Begründung einer endgültigen Philosophie mit dem Anfang der Menschengeschichte" (DF 1).

This short prelude may serve as a point of departure for Blumenberg's own theological innovations which find expression in the heading: 'The Fiction of Omniscience' (*Die Fiktion der Alwissenheit*) (BF 175ff). According to Blumenberg the expulsion from Paradise was not the result of human disobedience but rather the outcome of God's *ignorance*: God did not know what he did when he created the world (M 124). He knew even less about what he had done when he surrendered the very first humans to a life of self-preservation, leaving them with death as their chief concern. The expulsion from Paradise was nothing but God's fundamental *concern* that the only creatures which he had created in his own image would have a share in his monopoly of immortality.

In *Matthäuspassion* Blumenberg calls to his mind a Biblical expression which was placed in the main hall of his old school in Lübeck: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (M 28; Cf. Grønkjær 2002, 401-402). He explains that he was surprised to learn that the expression was be understood as a *genitivus obiectivus*, i.e. as man's fear of the Lord and not, as he himself had always understood it, as a *genitivus subiectivus*, i.e. the Lord's fear for something else. Despite the exegetical corrective suggested to him, it was the latter's interpretation which informed Blumenberg's 'theology' (M 30); the Lord's fear for his own creatures and their "Gottgleichheitsambition" (M 29). This interpretation thus constitutes the framework for Blumenberg's further conjectures; and it may perhaps be interpreted as a variation of the common saying: 'To err is human'. In Blumenberg's theology: 'To err is divine'.

In order to prevent his creatures from getting access to the source of eternal life after they had eaten from the Tree of Knowledge, God expelled them. He expelled man out of *fear* that he should "reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever" (*Gen.* 3:22). The penalty for man's (al-

leged) disobedience against the Lord was, as we know, pain, wearisome work and, above all, *death*. Blumenberg, however, turns the traditional interpretation of the relation between sin and death upside down: According to (a very controversial passage in) Paul's letter to the Romans: "death came into the world through sin and consequently the reverse could not be said – that man sins because he has to die" (LM 54/LN 64). This nonetheless is Blumenberg's working hypothesis. For a finite creature that has to live in a world of limited resources, the fight to survive – its elementary self-preservation – inevitably becomes its most vital *Lebenspensum*:

> Gott trennte die Menschen von der Lebensquelle, weil sie dort *seine* Rivalen werden mussten. Durch den Tod machte er sie zu *ihren* Rivalen auf Leben und Tod. Denn wenn der zweien der Garten gereicht hatte, reichte die ganze Erde den vielen niemals, weil jeder nur *ein* Leben hatte, um alles an allem zu haben. So kam mit dem Tod die 'Sünde' in die Welt, nicht umgekehrt (M 125)

Human finitude thus becomes the inescapable background for human sin, not the other way around. Or at least: Even if death came into the world because of sin, as Paul argued, it *remained* in the world because of death (LW 72). Expulsion first of all meant that man was surrendered to death and to his unguarded self-care under narrowed temporal and material conditions (M 228). Was it not exactly the lack of resources, human finitude and thus a manifestation of human *Sorge* which was the motive behind "the first murder" (M 125)? Cain brought an unprecedented evil into the world, but paradoxically enough only because the evil was already there: As finitude, as the brevity of human life-time and thereby as the inability to remain indifferent towards his barren soil: "Es kostete Lebenszeit, vom Leben alles zu bekommen, was alle von ihm haben konnten (…) Sonst hätte Kain wohl auf besseres Wetter warten können" (M 98). However it may be: With humanity's first murder, when Cain killed his brother Abel (Cf. *Gen.* 4:8), God saw himself confronted with something which he could not possibly have anticipated: The expulsion from paradise had engendered a family of potential killers. But was it really man who was to blame? What could he do

other than to try and come to terms with the drastically changed situation which was caused by his exclusion from paradise? In Blumenberg's reinterpretation of Cain's murder of Abel, it does not primarily symbolise man's self-chosen evil; rather, it is seen as a consequence of man's involuntary expulsion from the Garden of Eden.

How could an immortal God possibly know what it would be like to be a finite creature? How could God understand man's fundamental concern with death? Here we are, again, confronted with the paradox of absolute subjectivity. God as absolute and pure self-sufficiency would mean: A God enclosed in a reflexive circle of absolute self-reference without any intentional objects outside himself. This is a dilemma which could be described as follows: On the one hand, God's insouciance (*Sorglosigkeit*) would be unbearable since it would imply his absolute self-boredom; on the other hand God's possibility of rendering intelligible what *Sorge* 'means' would be unattainable since he would lack any intentional fulfilment, any intuitional foundation:

> Was aber Sorge ist, kann auch ein Allwissender nicht *a priori* wissen, nur und erst als Todgeweihter, Schmerzgezeichneter, von Untreue der sein Betrogener. Ob der Schöpfer sein Geschöpf lieben muß, um dem gleich zu werden, was er sich gleich machen wollte, bleibt offen; jeden Falls muß er aus Selbstliebe seine intentionale Erfüllung suchen (M 126)

According to Blumenberg, the Incarnation was not the manifestation of God's boundless love for his fallen creatures: The whole cosmological drama was nothing but God's own attempt to render intelligible what he had started, his endeavour to make intelligible what death, finitude, *Sorge*, pain and agony means in the first place. God had to render intelligible what it means to be a deadly creature; he had to *compensate* for his fundamental lack of evidence (*Evidenzmangels*) (M 126). The whole thing was nothing but "eine Sackgasse der göttlichen Unwissenheit, einer wesentlichen Gottesstupidität" (M 125). Divine ignorance – not human sin – was the secret starting point for *this* variation on a famous myth. The Incarnation and the Death of the Cross are construed as pivotal

events in the history of God's problematic relationship with his own creation, as he strives to address his own deficiencies: "The world and man are the absolute circumstantiality (*die Umständlichkleit schlechthin*) of God's dealings with himself" (WM 213/AM 238).

What is achieved by this re-occupation of familiar theological territory? What work do these unorthodox considerations actually do? First of all, Blumenberg's reimagining of the myth seems to establish room for an interpretation which cuts out the Christian idea of sin (or at least re-interprets it fundamentally). Sin is not the reference point (*Bezugspol*) of this story (M 127). It addresses itself to the 'contemporary listener of Bach' who doesn't understand or does not want to understand him or herself as a sinner in need of deliverance. It seems fair to assume that a contemporary listener may have some difficulties understanding what sin and deliverance actually means. In this light, the passion of St. Matthew sketches out an alternative horizon of interpretation for the contemporary listener. Secondly, Blumenberg's variation of the myth places a *different* God at our disposal: A God who suddenly *knew* what it would mean to be a finite creature concerned with death (M 128). A God, one might say, who had to manifest himself in the world and participate in the world on its own terms, for only then could he understand what he had done. Blumenberg's hypothesis is that God created the world as an unavoidable demonstration of his power *and* that his creation failed. That God fails in his dignified divine intention *with* and *in* the world is, Blumenberg claims, the main theme of the Passion (M 14-15). Can God be seen as one who has failed his creation? The question is rather what it would mean if God's creation were *not* capable of failure:

> Darf aber von einem Gott gesagt werden, daß ihm seine Schöpfung mißlingen konnte? Nun, er hätte sie sonst gar nicht zu unternehmen brauchen, wäre nicht dieses Risiko im Spiel gewesen. Er tat, was er konnte; und mehr konnte er eben nicht – und hätte keiner gekonnt (DM 82)

Blumenberg is not proposing a new mythology here. The myth of paradise rather functions as a 'guideline for phenomenological variation' (*Leitfaden der phänomenologischen Variation*) (BM 781). By undertaking phenomenological variations in the traditional myth, alternative possibilities of meaning are uncovered and the obviousness of the myth is questioned, as it comes to be seen against a background of what the phenomenologist would call its horizon of determinable indeterminacy (*Horizont bestimmbarer Unbestimmtheit*) (Husserl 1913, 92). But why vary a myth? Hasn't its truth claims been unmasked by the force of reason, its explanatory power surpassed by science? Blumenberg's claim is that the figurative power of this myth reaches far beyond its inherent truth claims. Or, with the help of a seemingly paradoxical formulation: The truth of this story is completely independent of its truth (*Das Wahre an dieser Erzählung ist ganz unabhängig von ihrer Wahrheit*) (BM 780). This formulation should not be misconceived as a licence to enigmatic obscurantism. But it may well be seen as a reflection of a more general tendency in Blumenberg's philosophical approach to myths: That myths work (*wirken*) beyond their power of theoretical explanation, by preserving and upholding questions, is what makes them important indicators for new historical understandings of reality (*Wirklichkeitsverständnisse*) (WbW 330). Blumenberg insists that philosophy has at its disposal a "right of proposal (…) a right that contains a high degree of imaginative freedom" (GkW 157/GdK 187) with regard to the employment of theological elements (Cf. KW 33). But what do these speculations have to do with Bach's *Matthäuspassion*? Moreover, what do they have to with the memory of God?

### 3.4 That, Which Leaves Traces…

In a short text which carries the title *Wirklich ist, was Spuren hinterlässt*, Blumenberg makes the following observations (Cf. BG 240-241): Footprints are often used as significant pieces of evidence for religious truth claims. Both Buddhism and Islam make use of footprints when presenting evidence for their respective religious claims: The big footprints of Buddha and the hotspur of the steed of Muhammed at The Temple Mount in Jerusalem are supposed to provide unmistakeable proof that these giants of religious history actually visited these places.

These footprints do not serve as tokens of *remembrance* but are supposed to establish "immediate presence and certainty" (BG 240). Jesus did not leave any footprints in connection with his Ascension. Why not?

With this small prelude a possible opening of Blumenberg's understanding of *Matthäuspassion* is established. According to Blumenberg, the very absence of visible signs of the Acension indicates that the Acension was in fact mere appearance; that it never took place. In the gospels the resurrection plays a small, peripheral role compared to the Passion. This is most evident in the Gospel of Mark: According to many scholars the Resurrection appearances were not part of his original account at all. Measured against the hard realism attached to the Passion, the Ascension stands out as artificial and 'unreal' (Blumenberg even declares it to be "highly superfluous" (M 304)). This alleged conflict between the Resurrection's somewhat artificial character and the stark realism of the Passion sets out the guidelines for Blumenberg's rethinking of Bach's *St Matthew Passion*. What are, then, the characteristic features of Bach's composition? Above all one thing: There is no Resurrection. Bach's *St Matthew Passion* ends "with the sealed, not with the empty grave (…) It leaves the community (*die Gemeinde*) in sorrow and tears, not in hope and certainty" (M 231). In line with this observation, Blumenberg locates another apparent conflict between the 'memorial ritual' (*Gedenkritual*), i.e. the foundation of the Last Supper, and the succeeding Resurrection. Why would the command in relation to the Last Supper – "Do this in remembrance of me" (*1. Cor.* 11:24; Cf. *Luk.* 22:20) – be so crucial if the Resurrection and the Ascension really were so certain, if it wasn't about the importance of *remembering*? Why would Jesus, just before he breathed his last, commit his spirit into his fathers hands (Cf. *Luke* 23:46) if it was only a question of hours before his spirit would rise from the dead and ascend to heaven (M 227)?

> Im Zentrum der christlichen Reflexion hatte die Anschauung vom sterbenden Gott gestanden – allerdings eines Sterbenden, der noch einmal auferstehen sollte, *obwohl* er sich gerade der Erinnerung überliefert hatte. Der Widerspruch zwischen Gedenkritual und Auferstehung ist nie empfunden worden (…) Die Differenz zwischen der An-

> schaulichkeit der Passion *und* der Unanschaulichkeit der Auferstehung ist selten als Ärgernis empfunden worden (M 303)

It is this difference, this internal conflict which becomes the point of departure for Blumenberg's attempt to put the Resurrection in brackets thereby leaving it out of his account. Or, in the language of phenomenology: As a task of 'free variation', as a piece of phenomenology, Blumenberg tries to *suspend* the Resurrection by means of a kind of phenomenological *epoché*. The attempt is, in a sense, to lose one God in order to regain another, a *possible* God. But if no resurrection takes place, how are we to understand the Death of the Cross?

### 3.5 Matthäusvariation

Blumenberg wants to shed light on the *latent* possibilities which Bach's *Matthäuspassion* provides for the "post-Christian listener" (M 9). His intention is to draw attention to the unfolded dimensions of meaning which this composition places at its listener's disposal. Moreover, Bach's musical version allows reconsideration of the significance of the Incarnation. The central question of the Passion is related to the *possibility* of a new concept or image of God which takes the Death of the Cross at face value. Blumenberg's basic approach is that Bach's passion music opens up a possibility for the listener to whom the question about sin and grace has become incomprehensible (Cf. M 223). The *realism* of the Death of the Cross is what dominates Bach's musical variation (GB 88). In this post-Christian horizon the music of Bach can re-open the Passion; it leaves a certain latitude for conjectures which point beyond the coagulated textual framework. To Blumenberg, Jesus' cry of despair on the Cross becomes the cry of the god-forsaken son who is now entirely emptied of confidence and reliance (M 209). *This* story ends with a community of mourners (*Trauergemeinde*) in tears; and the question which it leaves open is: "Darf ein Gott sich nicht quälen mit dem, was er angerichtet hat?" (M 250) How could God live with what he had done? Blumenberg's inscrutable answer is: Perhaps he could not – and perhaps the unbearableness of his son's agonizing death was what killed him too. The father is to be asked:

> (…) wie er mit der Passionslast des Sohnes hat weiter ein 'Gott' sein können (…) Ist es möglich zu denken, dass dies war, was ihn tötete? *Wir setzen uns mit Tränen nieder…* - über jenen Tod. Auch über diesen? (M 251)

Blumenberg's sympathy for the musical variation and its closeness to myth (Cf. WM 34/AM 40) here finds its striking expression in an attempt to undertake a transposition of the Christian dogma related to the Death of the Cross. Blumenberg's *Matthäuspassion* is therefore in fact a Matthäus*variation*; even though Blumenberg is reluctant to talk about 'remythicisation' (Cf. WM 161/AM 178), I think one may well describe his modulations in *Matthäuspassion* as an advancement of the Cusan idea of a "free variation of the given" (LM 491/LN 567) attempting a "remythicisation of the Concept of God that was 'purified' by philosophy" (WM 213/AM 238) and overtaken by dogmatics. The Cusan idea of a *contraction of God* here seems to find its peculiar parallel: God is in need of world and man, they are his "necessary, irrevocable and thus no longer contingent 'means'" (WM 213/AM 238) – it is the idea of remythicisation played out against divine omnipotence.

What happens if the Passion – and 'the death of God' – is taken at face value? The motive is *anti-Docetic* and *anti-Gnostic*. Blumenberg accentuates the *realism* of the Passion *and* the death of God in order to make room for God's Resurrection. 'Resurrection' should *not*, however, be understood in the traditional sense of the word within Christian theology. Rather, the irreversibly dead God reappears as a *remembered* God, as a God who *has been* and from now on only subsists in human memory. Paradoxical as it may seem: Not until his undefeated death on the Cross did God obtain his sublime perfection, his ineradicable past. God's irrevocable death and decisive disappearance assigns him to a *human community of remembrance*: A community of remembrance which guides and orientates with regard to what is worthy of being remembered, thus *binding* or *connecting* the present with the past. Such an interpretation may, at least implicitly, be suggested by the etymological relation between *religion* and *religare*: Religion is the attempt

to re-connect (*re*: again; *ligare*: bind, connect) through commemorative rituals for an absent past (Cf. Ricoeur 2000 43-44/52). The places of memory (*lieux de mémoires*) also constitute the means by which time can be transcended thereby opening up new ontological dimensions. In this regard, Ricoeur's understanding of the ontological function of the metaphorical expression as a way of proposing inhabitable worlds (*monde habitable*) seems to be re-echoed in his phenomenology of memory (Greisch 2004, 880). According to Blumenberg, 'the death of God' not only constitutes the point of departure for the establishment of a human community of remembrance; God also attains his perfection *through his death*:

> Die Erhabenheit der Gottesidee zeigte sich erst am festgestellten, unbetrauerten und dennoch unverwundenen Gottestod. Sein Verschwinden aus der Transzendenz wie aus der Immanenz bestätigte die Endgültigkeit seiner 'Aura' (…) Erst durch 'Erinnerung' ans Verlorene werde die volle 'Realität' des Gewesenen erreicht, 'hergestellt' und verbürgt (M 301)

In Bach's *St Matthew Passion* the ending chorus does *not* close with the triumphant Resurrection, but with God's death on the cross and the human tears in front of the sealed tomb: *Wir setzen uns mit Tränen nieder*. It is speechlessness, a community of sorrow and grief, not the glorious Ascension to his heavenly father, bringing this story to a close. The underlying idea here appears to be that not until God was irretrievably lost and vanished did he obtain his full *reality*. It is against this background that Blumenberg advances his provocative hypothesis that God has become 'more real' (*'wirklicher'*) as somebody who *has been*: "als Gewesener ist der Gott 'wirklicher' geworden denn als vermeintlich beweisbarer oder heilsnotwendig geglaubter" (M 301). That something attains reality through its disappearance is the main mode of thought behind these considerations. Blumenberg here takes up for reconsideration Nietzsche's famous words about the 'death of God': Nietzsche's dead God is a God who – *through* his death – has become definitively final and as such obtained a kind of perfection or 'invulnerableness' (M 302). Through his death God has become something ineradicably past. But that does *not* mean that God is entirely absent: We still know

about the absent or that which has been – at the very least we know that it no longer is. The absent is thus never the something totally absent. If that was the case then we would not even know *that* it was absent, and there would be no reasonable way in which we could refer to it as absent. Rather, even the non present must be somehow accompanied by something present in order to be known or perceived as such. Memory constitutes a way for the past (and thus the absent) to receive a modified presence and thus re-gain actuality (Cf. Sommer 1990, 11-13).

I have argued that *memory* constitutes the driving force behind Blumenberg's 'theology'. The enigmatic starting point for Blumenberg's considerations seems to have been: As one who *has been* God cannot *not* have been. Thus, the mysterious fact of *having been* forms his antidote against the corrosion of time. Whereas Blumenberg rejects understanding the Death of the Cross as in any way docetic, the reverse may be said to be the case of the Resurrection. Bach's *St Matthew Passion* is, according to Blumenberg, marked by the "die Grundstimmung der Endgültigkeit des Todes wie mit dem Gewicht des gesiegelten Steins vor der Graböffnung (…)" (M 245). In other words: Not only does God die on the Cross; with him *any* concept of God dies which does not take this death seriously: "Der Tod Gottes in Jesus gilt ihm (i.e. Blumenberg, UHR) so als der Tod jeden Theismusgottes wie jeden Doketismus" (Stoellger 2000, 484). One may of course ask: Why talk about the Death of the Cross if it is not a sign of salvation, if there remains nothing but tears and sorrow? Perhaps Blumenberg is here thinking within the framework of *negative soteriology* (Stoellger 2000, 484): Stoellger thus suggests that the completion of the release from absolutism constitutes the reason for and the limit of *both* God's *and* man's freedom: God had to relieve himself from his absolutism.

These considerations may be fruitfully considered in the light of Cusa's theology. It seems that Blumenberg is trying to imagine the completion of Creation through the Incarnation. Blumenberg thus seems (musically speaking) to 'change the signs' of the Incarnation: The death of Christ is not a propitiatory sacrifice which relieves mankind of its sins. In order to reach an understanding of his creation, God necessarily had to become human. The Passion and the

Death of the Cross become the key events which allow man to have a new, an alternative, God: A God who had finally understood what it means to be a finite creature concerned with death. The Passion thus offers humans *another God* than the one made available to them before:

> (…) einen Gott, er ihn (i.e. Man, UHR) endlich begriffen hätte und ihn die 'Folgen' der göttlichen Weltverstrickung nicht nach Art der Paradiesaustreibung allein tragen lassen will. Anders ausgedrückt: Nun wüßten sie beide, der Schöpfer und sein Geschöpf, welche Sorge der Tod in das Leben hineingebracht hatte (M 128)

Blumenberg tries (indirectly) to undertake a *weakening* of soteriology and eschatology in favor of a strengthening of the Incarnation and creation. According to Blumenberg, that God created man in his own image constitutes a central and yet regrettably overlooked dimension of Christian-Jewish thought (Cf. CU 46). In Cusa's idea of God's *self-contraction* one can locate the theological model behind Blumenberg's own theological journey as manifested in *Matthäuspassion*. Seen from the vantage point of modernity the Passion is not only about the death of Christ, but about God's death as such. The basic idea therefore seems to be that not only humans but also God is in need of relief from the absolute. The Death of the Cross signals God's leave-taking with himself. Blumenberg's own words, admittedly formulated in another context, epitomise this idea: "Once again, here too and on this side of all Idealism, it is very difficult to be a god" (GkW 107/GdK 130).

But a dead God is not identical with a forgotten one. With his death, God consigns himself to a human community of remembrance and from now on only *is* by virtue of this community of remembrance, as an unceasing work of memory (Cf. Lysemose 2007, 127). God is only present as a left but not forgotten background (Stoellger 2000, 479). What Blumenberg had left unnoticed in *Work on Myth* – the dynamics of the Trinitarian structure – *may* be located here. If one interprets "the metaphor of 'resurrection' as an imaginative memory of the crucified" (Stoellger 2002, 111), that is, as the establishment of a community of re-

membrance in which the Father and the Son are memorially present after their death, then the Holy Spirit *is* 'the resurrection' of a community of remembrance. Such a model of understanding is not, as we shall see, that far from a Hegelian understanding. Here we reach the core hypothesis of this dissertation: God remains ineradicably fixed in human memory through his death. The question is in which sense God can be said to have obtained a kind of *memorial eternity* through his death. Blumenberg's claim is that Nietzsche's 'dead God' is a God who *through his death* has become definitive and thereby obtained his untouchable perfection:

> Sein (Nietzsche's, UHR) 'toter Gott' ist der durch Tod endgültig Gewordene, an dessen Perfekt-Existenz keine Negation herankommt (…) Das Erinnerte *ist* nicht das Unveränderliche wie die Ideen; aber seine letzte 'Veränderung' *macht* es unveränderlich. Es gewinnt die Qualität aller Wünsche der europäischen Metaphysik. Als das Unwiederbringliche ist es unveränderlich geworden" (M 302)

We are here confronted with a paradox: It is the death of God which makes him eternal. But that does *not* imply that he remains *unchangeable*. The question is in which sense we are to interpret God's memorial presence on the backstairs of the enchanted world. The question may be formulated as a question about *the reality of the remembered*.

*Nun zeigt sich das wirkliche Problem:*
*das Problem des Wirklichen*
Peter Sloterdijk[37]

### 3.6 Reality Re-considered

[37] Peter Sloterdijk: *Kopernikanische Mobilmachung und ptolemäische Abrüstung*, (Suhrkamp: Frankfurt am Main 1987), p. 106.

No single English word translates *Wirklichkeit*. There seems, however, to be a decisive *philosophical* distinction between *Realität* and *Wirklichkeit* in the German language – or at least in Blumenberg's oeuvre – that deserves our attention, for it is often lost in translations from German to English. The matter is complicated and there is, of course, no one fixed definition of either *Realität* or *Wirklichkeit*. Whereas *Realität* is derived from Latin "res" (thing, matter; German: Ding, Sache) and thus emphasises the 'reification' (Ding-haftigkeit) of 'reality', *Wirklichkeit* is derived from the verb *wirken* and therefore stresses the processual or dynamic character (*wirk*-ung; *re*-sult).[38] The understanding of *Wirklichkeit* as that which creates an effect, result or influence (*"das, was wirkt"*) – in French the word often used to translate *Wirklichkeit* is *effectivité* – seems *prima facie* to have the advantage that it 'covers more reality' than the mere measurable, the palpable and tangible reality of things since it includes ideas, thoughts, language, symbols, images etc. What complicates the matter, however, is that the understanding of what counts as a 'thing' changes markedly through history. It seems that the uncritical 'reading in' of a certain modern and scientific understanding of 'thing' has been the occasion for much confusion regarding the interpretation of, say, German Idealism. The many different attempts to translate Gadamer's famous idea of *Wirkungsgeschichte*[39] indirectly mirror, as far as I can see, the difficulties of translating the word *Wirklichkeit*. Now, one of the interesting things in this respect is that one of Gadamer's basic critiques of the "crudeness" of what he calls "historical objectivism", is that it treats history as if it were an object. It construes "the phantom of a historical object" (*das Phantom eines historischen Objektes*) (Gadamer 1960, 305) and treats it as if it where some-*thing* (i.e. a 'thing', an 'object') that we can have at hand or at our disposal (what Heidegger refers to as 'presence-at-hand' (*Vorhandenheit*)).

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[38] *Resultare,* from Medieval Latin, literally means to leap back, spring back, from *re-* + *-sultare* (from *saltare* to leap) and thus is not derived from *res* (thing, matter).

[39] There are several attempts to translate this concept into English. Sometimes it is translated as 'history of reception', 'history of influence', 'history of efficacy' (Reinar Schürmann uses this wording in his English review of *Arbeit am Mythos* in *The Journal of Religion* Vol 64, No. 1, p. 135-136, p. 135.) or 'operative history' (Ted Peters *The Journal of Religion* Vol 55, No. 1, 36-56, who prefers this last translation (p. 41 (note 17)).

History is not an object at all, according to Gadamer. As opposed to this objectifying conception of history, Gadamer, and that is the main point here, speaks of *die Wirklichkeit der Geschichte*, i.e. the non-objective working or operating field of history as a situation where "die Wirkung dieser Wirkungsgeschichte am Werke ist" (Gadamer 1960, 305-312; 311). It is thus telling that Gadamer refers to the *Wirklichkeit* of history as opposed to history understood as an 'object' present-at-hand. When Reinhart Koselleck argues that concepts have their own mode of existence (*Seinsweise*), he does not mean to suggest, of course, that there is nothing but concepts. That would be patently absurd. But the fact the 'extralinguistic' (*aussersprachlichen*) conditions and factors can only be grasped linguistically, i.e. in point of language, means that linguistic reflection (*der sprachlichen Reflexion*) possesses theoretical and methodological priority: "Begriffe, in denen sich Erfahrungen versammeln und Erwartungen bündeln, sind als sprachliche Leistungen nicht bloße Epiphänomene der so genannten wirklichen Geschichte" (Koselleck 1977, 301). Concepts have their own *Wirklichkeit* since they form our interpretation of reality; they are carriers of expectations and wishes that *effect* our world and self-understanding. As Blumenberg remarks: Not only does language prescribe a certain horizon of expectations by thinking 'before us'; our reservoirs of images (*Bildervorrat*) and imagery choices *(Bilderwahl*) determine even more so "was überhaupt sich uns zu zeigen vermag und was wir in Erfahrung bringen können" (PM 91-92). In other words: What counts as 'real' always stands under the influence of certain historically transmitted expectations and presuppositions which are conveyed by language and (not least) contained in absolute metaphors. Our understanding of reality is (also) the product of such anonymous intentionalities.

Blumenberg does not offer a single, unambiguous definition of either *Realität* or *Wirklichkeit*. Rather, he approaches the question indirectly and from quite different (metaphorical, anecdotal, aesthetical, humorous etc.) angles. As Blumenberg – not without a touch of irony – remarks: "Realist möchte jeder sein; es zu werden setzt jeden in Verlegenheit" (M 259). This 'embarrassment' (*Verlegenheit*) stems from the fact that "unsere Welt arm an realistichen Erprobungen ist" (DVP 40). Such comments should, of course, be taken *cum grano salis.* Blumen-

berg's aim is not to deny 'reality' (whatever that may mean). Rather, Blumenberg generally wants to draw attention to the close relationship between expectations and reality: "What something is depends on the standard of expectations" (TU 35). That something may obtain effect *(Wirklichkeit*) through non-appearance (*An Wirklichkeit gewinnen durch Nichterscheinen*), is the guiding strategy of interpretation in one of Blumenberg's short texts from *Begriffe in Geschichten* (BG 145-147):

In 1977 the effort to finally prove or disprove the existence of Nessie, the famous national sea monster of Scotland, was perused with unprecedented commitment. In this particular year, however, no evidence was found at all. No one claimed to have detected the presence of Nessie: No strange noises, no intriguing photos, no evidence – nothing. One might assume that such a barren evidential return during a time when people were actually taking the search seriously would have signalled the beginning of the end of popular interest in the mythical monster of the Loch. But the reverse came to be true. The negative results of 1977 defied expectations and made the evidence of the preceding years all the more valuable! Even the dubious photos, which were beginning to become the stuff of parody, received a new lease of life, a new level of credibility, in the absence of fresh evidence. As Blumenberg remarks:

> Dieser Sachverhalt ist für unser Wirklichkeitsverhältnis aufschlussreich: Die Verweigerung von Zugeständnissen an unsere Erwartungen und Wünsche hat mehr mit der Realität zu tun als deren Erfüllung, auch wenn die Erfüllungserfahrung geneigt macht, in ihrem Objekt alles und mehr zu sehen als das, was erwartet worden ist. Die Wahrnehmung dessen, was es nicht gibt, überzeugt uns am Ende schon deshalb mehr von der Möglichkeit, das Nichtgegebene könne doch sein, weil es überhaupt so wenig selbstverständlich ist, Aufmerksamkeit an das zu wenden, was nicht existiert (BG 146)

Can the *possibility* of something be disqualified through non-appearance? Can the non-existence of God be verified empirically? To raise the ontologically question – 'is God really real?' – presupposes a rather rigid *metaphysical realism*. It presupposes that God is in fact a (possible) object of experience; it treats God

as if he were a stone or a table leg that we could stumble across. Moreover, to speak about the 'existence of God' presupposes a certain understanding of 'existence'. But perhaps we no longer know, as Blumenberg remarks, "if we know, what the expression 'existence' means" (NR 159)? What does it mean to say that 'God exists' – that he 'is', that he 'has been'? The answer to this question depends on the implied concept of reality. One could, with advantage, recall the concept of reality introduced earlier (which is the title of one of Blumenberg's short articles): "The real is that which leaves traces" (*Wirklich ist, was Spuren hinterlässt*) (BG 240-241). It may be that Jesus did not leave any traces or footprints in relation to his Acension, but 'God' as an absolute metaphor has, undeniably, left traces. In so far as he is remembered, God cannot be judged unreal since the memory of him still is at work (*wirken*) – so in the sense I specified earlier, he has 'reality' (*Wirklichkeit*). The aforementioned claim that 'what has been cannot not have been' is in fact a claim about the *irreversibility* of the past. Man cannot return to the past, nor does the past return *as* past. The past is irrevocably past. And yet it is not totally absent. Ricoeur speaks – in relation to Vladimir Jankélévitch – about "the irreparable, ultimate vestiges of the 'having been' and of 'having committed'" (Ricoeur 2000, 602/631). The question which should now be addressed is the (difficult) question about the reality of the past and the remembered, in particular the question about *the reality of God as remembered*.

I have already referred to the 'inaccuracy of memory' as that which allows memory to be productive, i.e. enables it to awaken new possibilities and call forth new dimensions of meaning. Moreover, memory has been portrayed as a fundamentally *ambiguous* power: On the one hand, it ensures continuity and maintains identity. As such, the remembered is not simply fictional; it constitutes a binding form of reality. On the other hand, the remembered is never indisputably given, not carved in stone, not fixed in unshakeable determinacy, but essentially open for interpretation. Thus memory is not just preserving but also creative. Memory belongs, as Blumenberg says, to "the regime of narrative transformations" (BG 89) in so far that it functions as a medium for poetic freedom which makes possible "an aesthetic retraction of the real in its horizon of possibilities" (*Rückverwandlung des Wirklichen in den Horizont seiner Möglichkeiten*)

(SP 151). As remembered, God is transferred to 'the subjunctive of the possible' (*der Konjunktiv des Möglichen*) (M 128). A remembered God is a God who resists the fetishism of facts and who escapes the metaphysical "process of coagulation" (Grønkjær 2005, 185) which the metaphysical tradition had made God the subject of. Were one to apply these considerations to a more general concept of *cultural memory* one could say: As an absolute metaphor, 'God' *is* real in so far as this absolute metaphor constitutes a binding form of reality, in so far as it affects us.

It is tempting here to paraphrase a statement made by Blumenberg in *Work on Myth* about a work's historical influence. Let me therefore apply his words to the question of God and make this paraphrase the point of departure for the following considerations.

> In the end all we have as an index of *God's* historical influence (*Wirkungsgeschichte*) is his sheer survival, the simple fact that he did not perish along with the mass of what has been forgotten (WM 171/AM 189-190, my insertion)

That God is not forgotten is what provides him with his reality (*Wirklichkeit*). The skeptical reader would probably raise the objection: What we remember – or what has not been forgotten – is not God but merely the (human) *images* of God! This objection presupposes, however, a metaphysically stout understanding of reality. As an absolute metaphor 'God' *does* possess *Wirklichkeit* – beyond the sterile question about this metaphor's *degree* of reality. The idea or image of God has – *nolens volens* – served as the tacit metaphorical background for man's attempt to reach an understanding of himself and his world. If God is that which – *ex hypothesis* – cannot be an object of experience, it seems clear that the arid ontological question about the 'reality of God' cannot be raised as a question about God's physical reality, but must be rephrased.

The question may be reformulated within a phenomenological horizon. Or, to be more precise, it may be reformulated as a question about the relation between *ontology* and *phenomenology*. One could formulate the matter like this: Is a phenomenology of history like the one suggested by Blumenberg not merely a *his-*

*torical* enterprise? Does it not merely relate to the 'phenomenal surface', the *historically* different *conceptions* of God? Does it in any way refer to the *ontological* question about (the *existence* or *reality* of) God? In short: Can a phenomenology of history deal with anything but (the memory of) the different (human) *ideas* of God? Does is not thereby fail to address the ontological question about God? Questions like these are laden with assumptions which are not as immediately apparent as they may seem. So let us probe these questions a little deeper.

First of all the relation between a *systematic* and a *historical* approach is perhaps not as easy to maintain as is often assumed. Perhaps the dividing wall between a historical and a systematic point of departure is no longer made of impenetrable concrete but has become porous, as Joachim Ritter writes in his introduction to the first volume of *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie* (Cf. Ritter 1971, 9). This observation seems to be of particular importance with regard to certain (metaphysical) questions which relate to phenomena which are not tangible to the degree, say, of questions about whether or not there is any coffee left in my coffee cup. To express my point less prosaically: That the *systematic* question about God is inseparable from the *historical* means that God cannot be distinguished from what humans (historically) have thought about him. That this idea may offend certain theologians does not undermine its philosophical strength. Moreover, the relation between *phenomenology* and *ontology* should not be understood as an exclusive disjunction. Heidegger's famous claim in *Sein und Zeit* – that 'ontology is possible only as phenomenology' (Cf. Heidegger 1927, 35; 38) – may serve as the theoretical background. Heidegger's claim can be understood as a claim about *the radical immanent character of transcendence*. The *transcendent* is not something (!) outside or above the world. Heidegger's understanding of transcendence is motivated by a fundamental rejection of any claim about the existence of a metaphysical *Hinterwelt* – an otherworldliness – behind or beyond the phenomena. Transcendence is immanent transcendence. The

guiding topographic metaphors for transcendence thereby become horizontal, not vertical.[40]

God is not, according to the late Kant, some*thing* outside me (*ein außer mir bestehendes Ding*), but my own thought (*Gedanke*) (Cf. BM 381-382). The point is that ideas (*Ideen*) – in a Kantian sense – cannot (and therefore should not) be subjected to the same demands as concepts. As Blumenberg notes in regard to Kant, ideas do not possess a verifiable reference to objects (*einen nachweisbaren Gegenstandsbezug*) (TdU 55). It is impossible to provide an intuition for the idea of God. Thus, this idea does not possess objective reality, but it nonetheless *may* possess *Wirklichkeit*: "Hier handelt es sich um Begriffe, deren Realität nur im *Prozess* der Vernunft selbst begründet sein kann, wenn sie überhaupt eine solche beanspruchen können" (TdU 55). That is why God is not, strictly speaking, a concept but a *symbol* – or, in the terminology of Blumenberg: An *absolute metaphor*. This absolute metaphor has a *history*; and its meaning *is* its history – nothing beside or outside of that. It is, in other words, misleading to *separate* the phe-

[40] Jean Greisch has, in a lecture given at the Center for Subjectivity Research (University of Copenhagen) on June the 5th 2008 (entitled "Das' Spiel der Transzendenz 'das Selbst und die Frage der Ethik") suggested an instructive distinction between four different forms of transcendence. Besides a *vertical* axis where transcendence is *either* conceived 'upwards' as in the traditional metaphysics (with topographic guiding metaphors such as 'sky', 'sun', 'mountain', 'star', etc.), i.e. as *ascent* (*trans-a-scendere*) *or* 'downwards' (with topographic guiding metaphors such as 'deep', 'foundation', 'ground', 'basis' etc.), i.e. as *descent* (*trans-de-scendere*), transcendence may also be conceived on a horizontal axis. Here, transcendence *either* can be understood as possibility, i.e. as a transgression of the (real) given (*trans-possibility*) *or* be associated with suffering (passion), i.e. with the fact that something 'happens to me' which changes me (*trans-passibility*). As far as I can see, the horizontal axis may both be conceived as pointing 'forward' or pointing 'backward': Transcendence may for example be conceived as related to a future where everything will be different (*utopia*). The Messianic expectation of Judaism may be an example of such a forward-orientated understanding of transcendence in so far as the Jewish Messiah is the entirely unknown and, as such, the pure 'still-not'. Transcendence may also, however, be conceived as backward-turned remembrance where the crucial point is that memory not only points back to what *actually* happened but also thematises the unfolded possibilities of the past. When we deal with the reality of the past we are inevitably also confronted with the possibilities which were not given substance; memory therefore may be said to transcend the frozen facticity of the past by once again calling forth the subsided possibilities.

nomenological level from the ontological (even though it may be possible to *distinguish* them). My attempt to distinguish between 'Realität' and 'Wirklichkeit' may be summarised like this: Even though the absolute metaphor 'God' does not possess (objective) reality, it does not mean that is has no *Wirklichkeit*. That is the reason why the question about God's *Wikrlichkeit* is in fact a question about this absolute metaphor's *Wirkung*. The decisive question relates to "die Möglichkeit der Wirkung der Bloßen Idee, der Idee als des Inbegriffs von Möglichkeiten" (SZ 102). To Blumenberg the question of the 'reality of God' may in fact be claimed to be identical with the question about the *effective possibility* of this idea or absolute metaphor.

**4. Melancholy, Nostalgia, and Work of Memory**

I have argued several times already that Blumenberg's metaphorological reopening of the question of God should be interpreted as an after-metaphysical *work of memory*. I have used the metaphor plastic/plasticity to refer to this work of memory, and we shall soon return to a more careful discussion of this idea. But let us first ask: What distinguishes a work of memory from *melancholy* and *nostalgia*?

In two important articles – *Erinnern, Wiederholen und Durcharbeiten* (from 1914) and *Trauer und Melancholie* (from 1915) – Freud discusses the possible lines of resistance in regard to the successful psychoanalytical clarification of the past (Cf. Greisch 2004, 883). Freud (who seems to play a rather significant role in Blumenberg) operates with a number of important distinctions which are – at least indirectly – related to our main theme. My intention is not to go into detail with these two remarkable essays; rather I wish to present some distinctions which may help to clarify the subject matter we are here dealing with. The question is: Can Blumenberg's memory of God avoid becoming melancholic or nostalgic? Or formulated positively: How might Blumenberg's memory of God be considered as a *work of memory* marked by *plasticity*?

In the first essay, Freud asserts the need for a 'work of memory' (*Erinnerungsarbeit*) as opposed to an incessant 'compulsion to repeat' (*Wiederholungszwang*) (Freud 1914, 130; 133). Towards the end of the essay Freud touches on the need

for *time* in order for the patient to 'work through' (*durchzuarbeiten*) his or her 'resistances' (Freud 1914, 135). As Ricoeur notes, the important thing here is the word 'work' or 'working' which is symmetrically opposed to compulsion (Ricoeur 2000 85/71). I have more than once pointed to the relevance of the metaphor 'work' to Blumenberg's philosophical enterprise, particularly in relation to his *work on metaphors* and his *work on myth*. In order to show that Blumenberg's 'memory of God' should likewise be understood as a *work* of memory (and not an obsessive compulsion to repeat) it is necessary to have a look at Freud's distinction between 'work of mourning' (*Trauerarbeit*) and 'melancholy' (*Melancholie*). Moreover, Freud understands mourning and melancholy as two different reactions to a loss. Or better: As "two sorts (*modalités*) of work" (Ricoeur 2000 87/72). The melancholic, Freud writes, is haunted by "eine großartige Ichverarmung (…) Bei der Trauer ist die Welt arm und leer geworden, bei der Melancholie ist es das Ich selbst" (Freud 1915, 431). Mourning is a normal (albeit painful) phenomenon which eventually sets free: "Tatsächlich wird (…) das Ich nach der Vollendung der Trauerarbeit wieder frei und ungehemmt" (Freud 1915, 430). A structural similarity between, on the one hand, *work of memory* and *work of mourning* and, on the other hand, *compulsion to repeat* and *melancholy* may be located here. Moreover, there seems to be a reciprocal relation between the work of memory and the work of mourning which Ricoeur describes thus: "The work of mourning is the cost of the work of remembering, but the work of remembering is the benefit of the work of mourning" (Ricoeur 2000 87-88/72).

Interestingly enough, Freud speaks (in *Der Mann Moses und die monotheistische Religion* (1938)) about the *compulsive character* attached to religious phenomena. Rather than understanding religion(s) as a question about tradition, Freud sees religion as the result of collective memory: "Eine Tradition (…) könnte nicht den Zwangscharakter erzeugen, der den religiösen Phänomenen zukommt" (Freud 1938, 208). In the collective group – as in the individual – traces of memory of the past are retained: "auch in den Massen bleibt der Eindruck der Vergangenheit in unbewussten Erinnerungsspuren erhalten" (Freud 1938, 201). The question which it seems tempting to ask against this background is: Does the death of God represent a *trauma* engraved in our collective memory? In Blumenberg's

variation on the 'death of God' hypothesis, it is not man (as with Nietzsche) but the father himself who handed his son over to his frightful death on the cross. Whether *this* God survived the death of his only son is unknown: "Ob er den Verzweiflungsschrei des am Kreuz gottverlassenen Sterbenden überhört oder überlebt hat, wir wissen es nicht" (DM 85). But what we *might* know is that immortality is only attainable through death – as Schiller's words (quoted by Freud) suggest: "Was unsterblich im Gesang soll leben, muss im Leben untergehen" (Freud 1938, 208).

The important thing in this context is, however, that while the incessant dwelling on an irrevocable past potentially leads to a compulsion to repeat, the work of mourning *as* a *work* of memory is characterised by the attempt to regain new meanings in what has been lost by disclosing new possibilities. This is exactly what characterises Blumenberg's thinking. In her illuminative text on Derrida, *Remembrance of the Future: Derrida on Mourning* (2006), Joan Kirkby refers to Derrida's decisive rethinking of Freud's understanding of mourning. She explains that Derrida introduces a certain kind of memory "as refracted through Hegel and de Man" (Kirkby 2006, 466) that seems to hold promising potentials for an understanding of mourning that is not simply arrested by a remote past but points forwards, that is, which is future-orientated and productive. Moreover, Blumenberg's (earlier introduced) idea of *Nachdenklichkeit* also seems to echo Freud's idea of *Nachträglichkeit* which is usually translated as either 'deferral' or, and I think more accurately, with 'afterwardness'. Freud distinguishes between delay (*Verspätung*) and afterwardness (*Nachträglichkeit*) – according to Derrida both are guiding and determinative concepts in Freud's thinking – the latter being something basically irreducible (Derrida 1967b, 303) in the sense that it, like the trace (*la trace*), resists the dominance of presence: "Il faut penser la vie comme trace avant de déterminer l'être comme presence" (Derrida 1967b, 302). According to Derrida's reading of Freud's idea of *Nachträglichkeit* and the unconscious *(das Unbewusste*) we are here confronted with "a past which has never been present" (*un passé qui n'a jamais été present*) (Derrida 1972, 22).

A past that has never been present? The power of memory does not simply consist in reawakening a past situation; it does not merely aim at bringing back

to life a remote past which actually existed. The power of memory is orientated toward the future and as such it finds itself beyond the negativity of the absent *and* the dominance of presence. Whereas Freud's model of mourning seems to presuppose that we must first relive and then relinquish our attachment to the dead – and therefore, in a sense, put the dead "to death again, by our own hand" (Kirkby 2006, 465) – Derrida recasts the traditional model of mourning by understanding the *trace* of the other not as re-appropriation aiming at finally forgetting, but as a "ongoing conversation with the dead", a "thinking memory" orientated toward the future (Kirkby 2006, 467; 469). Blumenberg's thinking may fruitfully be understood along these lines. As an after-metaphysical work of memory, Blumenberg's thinking is not simply as "memory without hope" (*Erinnerung ohne Hoffnung* (Wetz 1999, 31)), but also aims to open real as well as imagined possibilities of the past.

Douglas Headley has characterised the later Blumenberg's thinking as marked by a "melancholy note of resignation" (Headley 2008, 11). Headley finds this claim substantiated in Blumenberg's work, *Höhlenausgänge* (1989), where, as he writes, "the philosophical challenge in the wake of the failure of metaphysics" equals an attempt to renounce the "demand for ultimate meaning and significance" contained in the absolute metaphor of the cave (Headley 2008, 11). This melancholic track in Blumenberg's thinking has been stressed by several commentators. Franz Josef Wetz, for instance, understands Blumenberg's works as "ein Stück Trauerarbeit, in denen er von etwas für immer Zerbrochenem Abschied nimmt, ohne den Abschied vom Abschied jemals zu vollziehen" (Wetz 1999, 31). Wetz's characterization undeniably touches something correct. There is a trail of irrevocability, a sense of loss in Blumenberg's writings. And yet Wetz nonetheless seems to overlook the future-orientated dimensions, i.e. the generative and productive power of Blumenberg's backwards-turned work of memory. The past is, rightly understood, a *question about the future*:

> It is true that a sense of history is not yet a resolve to bring about a particular future; but there is no other way of gaining sensitivity for a future than through insight into the uniqueness and irretrievability of what is past. The fact that the future is composed neither of the

> wax figures of the past nor of the *imagines* [images] of utopian wishes is something that one can only learn from the specific *futures* (*den* Zukunften) of the past times that already make up our past (WM 98/AM 113)

I have already touched on Blumenberg's implicit reference to Kant's conception that reason has certain needs of orientation. Reason is in need of certain 'bildliche Vorstellungen' (Kant 1786, 267) in order to orientate itself. This insight is condensed in the apparent conceptual paradox that "reason has feelings that our feelings do not have" (Almeida 1995, 172). Related to the question of God this would mean: Even though reason is not capable of obtaining *theoretical* knowledge about God, it nonetheless feels a need to presuppose something "was ihr verständlich ist, voraus zu setzen, um diese gegebenen Erscheinungen daraus zu erklären, da alles, womit sie sonst nur einen Begriff verbinden kann, diesem Bedürfnisse nicht abhilft" (Kant 1786, 273-274). As Blumenberg notes in relation to Kant, reason's effort to grasp the conditioned through its conditions, and thus finally reach the unconditioned, ends "in an absolute embarrassment":

> Being expected to comprehend something that is not subject to the conditions of comprehensibility and nevertheless not being able to leave off at some arbitrarily chosen earlier stage that, because conditioned, is in fact comprehensible (LM 434/LN 509)

God thereby becomes nostalgia, i.e. both a need engraved in reason and at the same time absent to it. The word 'nostalgia' is derived from the Greek νόστος (return home) and ἄλγος (pain) and was introduced in Basel in 1688 by J. Hofer (Cf. Gerschmann 1984, 934-935). To say that God is nostalgia thus implies that God is the *passion*, that is, the pain related to what is absent. Is Blumenberg's understanding of God nostalgic? Is it a painful quest for something which we no longer have? Even though Blumenberg's metaphorological strategy ("Which God did we think we could have?") does sound nostalgic, focussing on losses and disappointments, Blumenberg explicitly rejects any suggestion that his 'God of memory' is a wistful or excessively sentimental yearning for the return of a past God:

> Solche Erinnerung [memories of the lost, UHR] braucht nicht die Reverenz der Nostalgie, des Trennungs- und Entbehrungsschmerzes zu erweisen; aber die Menschheit hat 'Erfahrungen' mit ihren Göttern gemacht, die nicht dem schlichten Vergessensdekret unterliegen (M 301)

In her article, *History and the process of mourning in Hegel and Freud* (2001), Catherine Malabou offers a remarkable reading of the connections between Hegel and Freud in relation to the question of 'successful mourning'. The considerations offered by Malabou deserve attention here since they address a field of relevant questions that are intimately connected to the present dissertation and at the same time enable a more precise formulation of the core hypothesis. Let us therefore turn to Malabou's reflections.

The main thrust of Malabou's essay is to show that there can be no 'world-making', and further "no world, no history, no historicality, without mourning" (Malabou 2001, 16). The problem is to understand mourning correctly - to 'get it right', as she puts it. In order to do so, Malabou turns to Hegel who in his *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte* (originally published in 1837), offers an interesting comparison between India and China as the personification of two extremes: Two exemplifications of radically different mourning procedures that Malabou represents, respectively, as *excess of preservation* and *excess of suppression* (Malabou 2001, 17).

In China, when the father dies, the son is expected to go through an "excessively long and severe period of mourning" (*überaus Grossen Strenge der Trauer*): He has to mourn for three years and is not allowed to eat meat or drink wine during this period, and no marriage can occur during the period of family mourning. It is essential (*unerlässliche Bedingung*) that the tomb be visited every year, and not uncommon for the corpse of the deceased father to be kept in the family home for three or four months, during which time no body is permitted to sit on a chair or sleep in a bed (Hegel 1837, 154-155). This model of mourning is characterised by a vehement praxis of preservation. The dead is conserved, wearisomely protracted and thus made "interminable" (Malabou 2001, 17).

Contrary to the Chinese, the Indians do not preserve, they burn their dead. According to Hegel, India – "das Land der Phantasie und Empfindung" (Hegel 1837, 174) – is characterised by a negative attitude towards the concrete. The Brahmans hold life in contempt. That is the reason why the Indians – in spite of how "cowardly and weak they otherwise are" (*feige und schwächlich die Inder sonst sind*) – only find little cost in sacrificing themselves to annihilation (*der Vernichtung aufzuopfern*) (Hegel 1837, 186-187). As Malabou concludes: "The characteristic of India, for Hegel, is 'evanescence'" (Malabou 2001, 17). In India the dead are not kept or preserved but handed over to an almost immediate obliteration. Now, of course Hegel's (in many ways prejudiced and outdated) description of these two Eastern cultures is not noteworthy for its factual accuracy. It is noteworthy because it offers two possible attitudes towards death, and thereby gives voice to two different *models* of mourning that still seem to be significant for an understanding of the relation between history, memory and forgetting. As Malabou writes:

> Chinese and Hindu funerary practices allow us to throw light on two extremes. One could characterize these on the one side as excess of preservation – Chinese mourning is interminable – and, on the other side as an excess of suppression – Hindu mourning is too short, too radical; consumption by fire does not permit the true conservation of the spirit of the departed (Malabou 2001, 17)

According to Malabou, a successful mourning is to be found *between* maintenance and annihilation: In the space between "obsessive recollection and total forgetting" (Malabou 17). The figure of thought that constitutes this in-between is Hegel's notion of *Aufhebung*. Successful mourning is, according to Malabou, characterised by finding the "right proportion between fixity and evanescence, obsession and absolute forgetting" (Malabou 2001, 19). It is what Malabou calls: *plastic*. Relating these considerations to the question of God we may say: The death of God inaugurates a work of memory which is, respectively, a work of mourning. In order for this work to be neither interminable nor too short, neither obsessional nor suppressive, it must be plastic.

### 4.1 Memoria Dei – Genitivus Suibjectivus or Obiectivus?

'The memory of God' is a double genitive. But is there any way in which the *genitivus obietivus* – God's memory of… – can *philosophically* be substantiated on the background of the foregoing considerations? The task is not easy but at least some suggestions can be made. What the memory of God reveals to us, when we dive into the rich reservoirs of images and ideas about him which are enclosed in our tradition, is a merciful God who would remember *us* beyond our death: A God who would remember us even if we have forgotten him (Dalferth 2007, 137f). This idea of a remembering God seems insidiously present to us when *we* remember God. That God has 'engraved us on the palms of his hands' (*Isaiah* 49:16) is, in other words, the theological reflection which reminds us of a God who would not forget us even when all traces of us had been buried in oblivion. God has thereby functioned as the 'centre of gravity' for the human hope not to be forgotten despite our death. Moreover, this ambiguity in relation to the 'memory of God' may form the basis for a kind of *mutual self-preservation through memory* between man and God: "nicht vergessen, was gewesen ist, um nicht vergessen zu werden: Urstiftung von Erinnerung als Anrecht auf sie" (VS 373). We remember God, *because* God first remembered us (to paraphrase *1. John* 4:19: "We love, because He first loved us"). If the plasticity of memory is likewise understood in its double meaning – partly as something that *receives* its form *from* something else (namely the remembered), partly as something that *gives* a certain form *to* the remembered – one may perhaps sense the contours of a 'theology of remembrance' which contains *both* genitive forms: The God we remember is, on the one hand, characterised by an openness to remodeling: The plasticity of our memory makes God changeable. But the God we remember is, on the other hand, also a remembering God and therefore this God also shapes our remembrance of God. God is thereby preserved in a human community of remembrance as "an act of 'solidarity' over time" (*ein Akt von 'Solidarität' über die Zeit*) (Leg 409). Recalling the earlier distinction made between *Wirklichkeit* and 'reality' one may say: The *Wirklichkeit* of this remembering God consists in hav-

ing left traces which somehow *affect* us (Cf. Ricoeur 1985, 219: *La trace est un effect-signe*).

To designate this movement 'dialectical' is not, of course, in itself an amulet against the argument's untenability. However, these considerations do find themselves in remarkable proximity to some of the key aspects of Hegel's philosophy on religion. It therefore seems tempting to identify some possible links between Hegel and the proposal which I have suggested here. The overall intention is to give voice to a *speculative* variant of memory which Blumenberg's understanding of memory does not seem to admit to. I base my interpretation of Hegel, at least primarily, on Michael Theunissen, and Catherine Malabou.

### 4.2 Hegel's Er-Innerung

Hegel's concept of memory differs from the phenomenological one outlined above. The concept of memory which is operative in Hegel's thinking is *not* that of an experiential recollection (*Erlebniserinnerung*)[41]. Moreover, Hegel's thinking is not primarily conceived as a re-membrance or re-collection of some earlier experience; in fact, it does not even have (human) consciousness as its obvious collective and organisational centre. Rather, it is *Seinserinnerung*, 'ontological recollection' or, as I would prefer to translate it: 'remembrance of being'. It is characteristic of Hegel's concept of memory that he (in the last part of *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (1807)) writes *Er-Innerung* with capitals and a hyphen (Theunissen 2001, 29). This is more than a stylistic idiosyncrasy. It voices precisely the guiding idea of the Hegelian concept of memory: The process of a person going-into-himself is a process of appropriation or more precisely: "A process of appropriation aimed at self-appropriation" (*ein Aneignungsprozess, der auf Selbstaneignung zielt*) (Theunissen 2001, 30-31). This process of going-into-oneself is signalled by

[41] Again, English translations of German key terms are very difficult. Michael Theunissen's text, *Reichweite und Grenzen der Erinnerung* (2001), to which I refer, provides an English translation in parallel. This translation seems problematic, however: In some places the translator has even left out small but significant portions of text from the German original!

the way in which Hegel writes *Er-Innerung*: It is a process where he ("Er") who goes into himself ("Innerung") is undergoing a *productive* (from Latin *pro-* forward + *ducere* to lead) – i.e. is being led forward to and being 'induced' – change: "In appropriating ourselves, we are simultaneously changing ourselves" (Theunissen 2001, 30). As a process of self-appropriation *Er-Innerung* has to do with the way in which one takes up one's past and everything in it. When we go-into-ourselves we are not simply encapsulated in our past but can transcend it. By appropriating ourselves we are reconciled with ourselves but at the same time we become another self. Theunissen suggests associating such memorial acts with the German term 'gedenken'. Again, Christian Lotz's etymological observations are relevant:

> A crucial distinction has to be made between "Erinnerung" (memory) und "Gedächtnis" (memory), both terms of which are important for Hegel in his *Encyclopedia* as well as for Heidegger's *What is Called Thinking?* The German "Gedächtnis" (memory) points to the term "thought" (Gedanke), and "erinnern" (remembering, remembrance) points to something that becomes actively internalized, that is to say, to something that is turned into one's own and belongs to one's inner life. In English the difference between "recalling" (points to voice) and "recollection" (points to gathering and synthesis) is important. In recollection one re-unifies oneself with oneself and gathers oneself together (Lotz 2004, 124)

In the act of self-appropriation we go, as it were, into ourselves and thereby *gedenk* ('hold in remembrance' is the English translation chosen for *Gedenken* which, however, misses the connection between 'Gedanke' (thought), 'Denken' (to think), 'Gedächtnis' (memory) and 'Danken' (to thank)) all others who have come to matter to us (Theunissen 2001, 31). The important thing here is that this process of *Er-Innerung* is not, according to Hegel, limited to the individual's level but 'applies' to reality as such, i.e. it has *universal* significance. Also 'being' (*Sein*) is appropriated through a similar process of internalisation (*Verinnerlichung*). The starting point is the 'factual' being which is a certain, determinate being whereas the end point is this self-same being's 'essential' truth (Theunis-

sen 2001, 38-39). To Hegel all (true) knowledge is knowledge of essence: "Die *Wahrheit* des *Seins* ist das *Wesen*" (Hegel 1813-1816, 13). Hegel establishes a connection between *Sein* and *Wesen* by using the German etymology related to the expression *ge-wesen*, 'having-been':

> Erst indem das Wissen sich aus dem unmittelbaren Sein *erinnert*, durch diese Vermittlung findet es das Wesen. – Die Sprache hat im Zeitwort *sein* das Wesen in der vergangenen Zeit, *"gewesen"*, behalten; denn das Wesen ist das vergangene, aber zeitlos vergangene Sein (Hegel 1813-1816, 13)

The essence (*Wesen*) of being (*Sein*) is established by *having been* (*ge-wesen*). We here catch sight of the aforementioned enigmatic 'eternity' connected with the 'having been'. The *tempus praeteritum* thus signals, to Hegel too, a kind of backward orientated eternity. One may perhaps consider Hegel's considerations in regard to *Er-Innerung* as a kind of *dynamic Platonism*, since it constitutes a historicising of the Platonic doctrine of ἀνάμνησις: Also to Hegel all (true) knowledge is basically 're-collection of the essence of things' (*die Erinnerung des Wesens aller Dinge*) (Cf. Theunissen 2001, 37) and as such is conceptually grasped (Cf. *Be-griff*) knowledge; but with the crucial addition that truth is not something which is passively given prior to its apprehension, but the active result of the spirit's grasping (*be-greifen*). As already stated: Hegel's *Er-Innerung* is in fact *Seinserinnerung*, 'remembrance of being'. What has been said about a person's going-in-to-himself should therefore really be conveyed to 'being': *Er-Innerung* is a 'going-into-being' (*ein Ins-Sein-Gehen*) (Theunissen 2001, 37). It may perhaps be helpful to recall a famous definition from Aristotle here. Aristotle defines – in chapters 7 and 9 in his *Metaphysics* book 12 – God's activity as νόησις νοήσεως: As 'thought thinking itself' (Cf. *Met.* 1074b, 33ff). Hegel (who has placed this passage from Aristotle in the concluding remarks of his *Enzyklopädie*) seems to adopt this definition by transposing it by means of his *Er-Innerungs*-concept: Absolute spirit is being remembering itself! Whereas traditional metaphysics has moved beyond (*Hinausgehen*) being, Hegel's wants to go into *(Hineingehen*) it. Instead of stepping out, what has to be done is to step inside:

> Diese Bewegung als Weg des Wissens vorgestellt, so erscheint dieser Anfang vom Sein und der Fortgang, der es aufhebt und beim Wesen als einem Vermittelten anlangt, eine Tätigkeit des Erkennens zu sein, die dem Sein äußerlich sei und dessen eigene Natur nichts angehe. *Aber dieser Gang ist die Bewegung des Seins selbst*. Es zeigte sich an diesem, daß es *durch seine Natur sich erinnert*, und durch dies Insichgehen zum Wesen wird (Hegel 1813-1816, 13, my italics)

We here have to do, as Theunissen explains, with a remembrance of being (*Seinserinnerung*) which must be understood as *double genitive*; it is a remembrance of being which contains both the *genitivus subiectivus* and *obiectivus* (Theunissen 2001, 38-39). But how can this idea of a *self-remembrance of being* possibly be associated with the death and the memory of God?

When Hegel (in *Glauben und Wissen* (1802)) speaks of 'the death of God' as a philosophical event which marks a specific modern experience he explicitly keeps the Christological back scene in mind: The philosophical loss of certainty regarding God which Kant, as much as anyone, argued in favour of in his critical thinking, corresponds theologically speaking with the event of the Crucifixion. Moreover, the son's cry of desperation on the cross: *Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?* (*Matt.* 27:46) resounds in the modern state of philosophy where God, too, seems to have abandoned human subjectivity. Hegel thus brings the *double articulation* of 'the death of God' together and links the *philosophical* with the *theological* dimension of meaning (Malabou 1996, 145). There seems to be a common destiny of philosophy and theology in the experience of loss and absence. As Malabou explains "il existe un rapport fondamental entre la kénose divine et la tendance de la raison moderne à poser un au-delà qui lui demeure inaccessible" (Malabou 1996, 146). Therefore there is, to Hegel, a systemic correlation between the modern condition of philosophy and the speculative content of divine *kenosis*. In his *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion* (1832), Hegel makes the following observation:

> Gott ist gestorben, Gott ist tot – dieses ist der fürchterlichste Gedanke, daß alles Ewige, alles Wahre nicht ist, die *Negation selbst in Gott* ist; der höchste Schmerz, das Gefühl der vollkommenen Rettungslosigkeit, das Aufgeben alles Höheren ist damit verbunden (Hegel 1832, 291)

To Hegel this frightful feeling of complete irretrievability is, however, only the *first* moment, the first *negation* which is overcome by the reverse movement: Namely that God maintains (*erhält*) himself and thereby negates this negation. This 'negation of the negation' is, as Hegel writes, "the death of death" (*der Tod des Todes*) constituted by the Resurrection (*die Auferstehung*) (Hegel 1832, 291; Cf. Malabou 1996, 151). But what does Resurrection mean?

Hegel expands his (aforementioned) *logical* concept of *Er-Innerung* into a theory of *historical* remembrance or memory (Theunissen 2001, 40-41). This process is philosophically substantiated by the central position ascribed to *Vorstellung* – figurative thinking (Cf. Ricoeur 1985, 41) – in Hegel's philosophy of religion. *Vorstellung* is defined as a dynamic that is at once an 'exteriorisation' (*Ent-Äusserung*) and an 'interiorisation' (*Erinnerung*) of the content of thought (Malabou 1996, 156). Both these moments are constitutive to *Vorstellung*. The inner dynamism of *Vorstellung* (or figurative thought) manifests itself in different religious forms through history, but it is – not surprisingly – with Christianity that "the inner dynamism (*le dynamisme interne*) of *Vorstellung* reaches it climax" (Ricoeur 1985, 48). Why does *Vorstellung* possess an exceptional status in Christianity? Hegel's answer is: Because of the Incarnation; i.e. because of the "Menschwerdung des göttlichen Wesens" (Hegel 1807, 550). It is the Incarnation of the Absolute – divine *kenosis* – which forms *one side* of the dynamism of *Vorstellung*. As 'exteriorisation' (*Ent-Äusserung*) the Absolute manifests itself in the world. That is the basic content of Incarnation. To Hegel this 'exteriorisation' finds its culmination in the Death of the Cross which signals the knowledge of 'the absolute loss' (*vollkommene Verlust*) (Hegel 1807, 547). Moreover, it is this absolute 'exteriorisation' (*vollkommene Entäusserung*) of the Absolute which eventually "expresses itself in the hard saying that 'God is dead' (*das Gott gestorben ist*)" (Hegel 1807, 547). The *other side* of this dynamic movement is, however,

the 'interiorisation' (*Erinnerung*) *of* this speculative event. What does that mean? It means that 'the death of God' has its counterpart in God's Resurrection; but this Resurrection should be interpreted exactly as the establishment of a community (*Gemein(d)e*) of remembrance (*Erinnerung*) (Cf. Hegel 1807, 556). The death of God *is* this death's Resurrection as Spirit (*Geist*): "dieser Tod ist daher sein Erstehen als Geist" (Hegel 1807, 565). The Incarnation and the Cross signals the transformation of God; it signals the passing over of God's being (*Sein*) into his 'having been' (*Gewesensein*):

> Dieser einzelne Mensch also, als welcher das absolute Wesen offenbar ist, vollbringt an ihm als Einzelnem die Bewegung des *sinnlichen Seins*. Er ist der *unmittelbar* gegenwärtige Gott; dadurch geht sein *Sein* in *Gewesensein* über (…) oder wie er vorher als *sinnliches Dasein* für es aufstand, ist er jetzt *im Geiste* aufgestanden (Hegel 1807, 555)

The Resurrection therefore *is* – or 'produces itself' (*se produit*) – in the community (Ricoeur 1985, 51). Thus, it is the community which – in the form of unceasing memorial interpretation – establishes the 'form of picture-thinking' (*Form des Vorstellens*) (Hegel 1807, 556). God withdraws himself from the world in order to resurrect in a community of remembrance. That is the reason why Ricoeur can claim that Ecclesiology 'absorbs Christology':

> L'ecclésiologie, ainsi, absorbe la christologie. Cette dissolution de l'immédiateté de la presence historique dans la vie spirituelle de la communauté est l'équivalent (…) de l'*Erinnerung* sur laquelle s'est achevée la dialectique de la religion esthétique (Ricoeur 1985, 51)

Through his death God abandons his being (*sein Dasein*) and hands over his form to memory (*seine Gestalt der Erinnerung übergibt*) (Hegel 1807, 590). It is in the shape of *memory* that the absolute from then on has its reality. Thus, it is *the memory of the absolute spirit* which from now on establishes "die Wirklichkeit, Wahrheit und Gewißheit seines Throns" (Hegel 1807, 591). The memory of the absolute spirit must not, it should be noted, be interpreted one-sidedly as a *geni-*

*tivus subiectivus*. The difficult thing here is that Hegel's thought moves from "going-into-being to being's going-into-itself (*In-sich-Gehen des Seins*)" (Theunissen 2001, 42-43): The memory of the absolute spirit means both the human memory of God *and* the absolute spirits (i.e. God's) self-remembrance. God's self-remembrance *through* human memory, one could perhaps say. To Hegel 'the memory of God' therefore is a double genitive; a double genitive which finds its articulation in the spirit's self-remembrance through a human community of remembrance.

Hegel's concept of *Er-Innerung* presents us with a dialectical model of reflection which voices *both* genitive forms implied in 'the memory of God'. Hegel's *Er-Innerung* is a ('ontological') remembrance of being or rather: It is the 'going-into-being' *as* 'being's going-into-itself'. The dialectical movement between God's 'exteriorisation' (*Entäusserung*) (understood as *kenosis*) and God's 'interiorisation' (*Er-Innerung*) (understood as Resurrection) is in fact *God's self-movement*. One could, following Malabou's line of argumentation, say that the decisive role ascribed to *Vorstellung* by Hegel only translates "sur le plan de la pensée individuelle, un *processus inhérent à Dieu lui-même*" (Malabou 1996, 157). The process of *Vorstellung* is a movement in God or 'in being self'. It is a 'manifesation of temporalisation' (*mise en forme temporelle* (Malabou 1996, 158)) which Malabou designates as *plastic*. This 'plasticity' is inherent to God and explicitly related to the temporal structure of Christianity: "En parlant d'une 'plasticité' de Dieu, la présente analyse entend précisement insister sur le *temps* du christianisme" (Malabou 1996, 162). Malabou sees with the Incarnation the *creation* of a new time and temporality which at the same time *changes* God. Here, the connection between God's *philosophical* inaccessibility and the *theological* content of the *kenosis* becomes clear: The *double meaning* of 'the death of God' – its modern philosophical manifestation ("*daß der Mensch Gott nicht erkennen könne*" (Hegel 1830, 373)), and its *theological* dimension of meaning (the passion of the Son who dies) "*in den absoluten Schmerz der Negativität*" (Hegel 1830, 285)) – find their *common ground of articulation* in the *plasticity* of God: "Dieu donne à la subjectivité philosophique une forme temporelle et la reçoit, en retour, de la philosophie elle-même comme l'écho douloureux et prolongé de sa kénose" (Malabou

1996, 172). Malabou's overall intention is to show that the plasticity of God manifests itself most decisively in the *future* dimension, in the (eschatological) 'to come' (*Dieu comme (se) 'voir venir'* (Malabou 1996, 159). The title of her book – *L'avenir de Hegel (The Future of Hegel*) – must be understood against this background. Moreover, the title holds a double meaning: 'The future of Hegel' must partly be understood as Hegel's own (latent and unfolded) philosophy of futurity, partly as a reply to the critics who have maintained that Hegel cannot have a future since Hegel's system is a closed circuit, firmly sealed with stern necessity. Against the *apparent* shortage of futurity in Hegel, Malabou thus argues that Hegel indeed *has* a future (in both the meanings contained in this expression). In short: Hegel's future lies in the way in which he thinks futurity.

Let me now try to sum up some of these admittedly rather condensed considerations. 'The memory of God' may be said to represent to Hegel an answer to the question: How can God be present despite his absence? The immediate opposition between God's absolute absence, on the one hand, and his absolute presence on the other, reveals itself to Hegel as an *abstract* opposition. The task therefore is to recover this opposition's *speculative unity* (Cf. Ritter 1956, 252). The dialectical unity of presence and absence seems to find its expression in *God's self-remembrance* through the formation of a (human) community of remembrance. But does that not imply that 'the Memory of God' is eventually subordinated to the *objective* genitive form? There undeniably is, as Theunissen critically remarks, a tendency in Hegel to "take the movement to be performed by the subject and dissolve it in the self-movement of being (*in die Selbstbewegung des Seins aufzulösen*)" (Theunissen 2001, 44-45). In other words: Does not the overall idea of 'being-in-itself remembering-itself' abrogate or disenfranchise the subjective acts of recollection? When Hegel understands the self-movement of being as being's self-remembrance (*Selbst-erinnerung*) he seems to eliminate the finite subject, stripping it of its contingency and thus "leaving the *subjective* spirit with nothing more to do" (Theunissen 2001, 48-49). Theunissen here seems to re-voice a Kierkegaardian protest raised against Hegel in his *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (1846). Here Kierkegaard speaks about the speculative thinker's (Kierkegaard is thinking of Hegel) attempt to catapult him-

self out of his subjectivity by means of the 'backdoor of memory' (*Erindringens Bagdør*) (Kierkegaard 1846, 174). The 'backdoor of memory' is Kierkegaard's metaphor for the speculative thinker's endeavour to seek eternity by transcending space and time in a kind of Platonic *anamnesis*, thereby at the same time fatally *forgetting* that existence is always existence 'in' space and time (Cf. Wind 1987, 106). Kierkegaard therefore speaks about how memory takes itself speculatively out of existence back to eternity (*Erindringens Tagen sig ud af Existentsen tilbage i det Evige*) (Kierkegaard 1846, 189). It thereby makes all existential decisions, all subjectivity a mere shadow play (*Skyggespil*) of that which has already been eternally decided (Kierkegaard 1846, 189). Hegel's speculative system misplaces eternity: Pushing it to a backward-turned, memorial horizon which abrogates the irreparableness of human subjectivity.

**5. Towards the Plasticity of Memory**

Whether or not Kierkegaard's (and Theunissen's) critique of Hegel does justice to Hegel should not be discussed here. Rather, the important thing is that Hegel presents us with a model of (ontological) memory which contains both genitive forms implied in the expression 'the memory of God'. However it may be: Even though Hegel's model may be claimed to be *theologically* appealing (since it operates with an idea of the Absolute's self-remembrance), it is questionable whether it can be substantiated *philosophically*. In light of Blumenberg's considerations it seems difficult to maintain both genitive forms. Yet it is obvious that Blumenberg's memorial work on the absolute metaphor 'God' is marked by an unsolved and metaphysically open character; rather than simply negating the possibility of a God who remembers us and thus forms *an image of hope against death* (Ernst Bloch), Blumenberg's considerations seem to give rise to (what Olivier Abel has called) "a geography of dilemmas" (Cf. Ricoeur 2000, 478/619). Such a geography of dilemmas is related to the question of the *plasticity of memory* or rather: Whether or not God must be given up as an index of human hope seems to depend on *the degree of plasticity* which is ascribed to memory. Let us therefore take this dilemma a bit closer into consideration.

Quentin Meillassoux has, in his remarkable essay, "Spectral Dilemma" (*Dilemme Spectrale*) (2006/2008), touched on an interesting dilemma which seems to possess immediate relevance for our present considerations. What does spectral dilemma mean? 'Spectral' is Meillassoux's term for a dead person whose death is so terrible that it cannot be mourned: A death which cannot be come to terms with. The dilemma related to spectrals arises from the fact that *neither* a religious *nor* an atheistic approach to such spectrals is satisfying: Whereas the *religious position* "establishes that mourning is not possible unless we hope for the dead something more than their death", the *atheistic position* "establishes that the existence of God is an insurmountable obstacle (…) for only a perverse God could permit terrible deaths, and only an even more perverse God could make himself loved for doing so" (Meillassoux 2006, 267). Thus, the spectral dilemma can be formulated like this: To the religious person spectrals *without* a God would be marked by hopeless despair since it would give death the last word; to the atheist, on the other hand, spectrals *with* a God would turn God into a merciless sadistic since he would then allow such terrible deaths to take place *despite* his ability to avoid them. Now, Meillassoux suggests resolving this dilemma by means of third way. This third way is an attempt to integrate the (religious) idea of the possible resurrection of the dead with the (atheistic) claim of the non-existence of God. How is this to be done? Meillassoux's key to resolving the spectral dilemma is found in the expression: *divine inexistence*. Divine inexistence has two different meanings which are, however, related: One the one hand, it means (as it most commonly does) that the religious (and metaphysical) God does not exist, that 'there is no God'. On the other hand, however, divine inexistence may also signify "*the divine character of inexistence* (…) the fact that what remains still in a virtual state in present reality harbours the possibility of a God still to come" (Meillassoux 2006, 268). This last point is important. The *inexistent* is here understood as that which is not yet but nonetheless *may* come; it relates to the sphere of the future possible. By displacing God to the sphere of the *possible*, i.e. to the inexistence of *futurity*, Meillassoux wants to dissolve the (in his eyes merely) *supposed* necessary alternative between the mutually excluding possibilities: Either God exists or he doesn't. By shifting modality and main-

taining that *God is possible*, the alternative: God either must or must not exist, is disintegrated and reattached "to the virtual (God could exist)" (Meillassoux 2006, 269). In order to establish God as possible, Meillassoux makes a claim which has its point of departure in a *speculative variation*, or rather: A turning upside down of Hume's famous critique concerning the rational justification of our belief in casual necessity. Moreover, Meillassoux's claim is that "laws might break down without reason in favour of an eventuality incompatible with them" thus asserting "the possibility of their being modified any moment" (Meillassoux 2006, 273). The *failure* of the Principle of Sufficient Reason (*nihil sine ratione*) in regard to the laws of nature becomes the (speculative) point of departure for a claim about the fundamental contingency of natural laws. But does this really mean that the laws of nature are *radically* contingent? And if so – how do we explain the constitutive stability of them? Meillassoux here makes a distinction between necessity and stability: The laws of nature may well be said to be stable, but that does not imply that they are necessary. It is against this background that Meillassoux introduces his definition of God as "*the contingent, but eternally possible, effect of a Chaos unsubordinated to any law*" (Meillassoux 2006, 274). To Kant's famous question – for what may I hope? – Meillassoux thus gives the answer: For a contingent, inexistent God of possibility emancipated from the Principle of Sufficient Reason. Meillassoux concedes that his considerations are *speculative*, but he denies that they are *metaphysical* since he defines the latter as grounded "on a modality of the Principle of Sufficient Reason" (Meillassoux 2006, 274) which is exactly what Meillassoux wants to avoid. His God is an inexistent but possible God who might yet come.

In what sense are these (admittedly highly speculative) considerations related to plasticity? What do I mean by 'plasticity of memory'? Plasticity (*Plastizität*, *plastisch*) here means malleability, the ability to transform and reconfigure something. According to Malabou the term 'plasticity' (*plasticité*) embraces several different meanings. She does not offer any one clear and distinctive definition. Rather, plasticity is deliberately left undetermined (Malabou 2000, 133) and used, as already pointed out, as the *fil conducteur* of her investigation into the dialectical enterprise of Hegel's philosophy as a whole. In an article published in

the *Bulletin of the Hegel Society of Great Britain* in 2000, Malabou makes the following instructive observation:

> The meanings of plasticity have not ceased and will not cease to evolve in language. One thinks of today's "plastic materials" or even of "plastic" as a dangerous explosive substance. The very plasticity of the term "plasticity" leads it to extremes, from taking on form (in sculpture) to annihilation of all form (in explosion) (Malabou 2000, 134)

The decisive point is that 'plasticity' has contradictory connotations which make it something 'plastic' in itself. It designates both that which can (passively) receive form (from something else) and that which (actively) gives form (to something else). Malabou therefore draws the conclusion that plasticity "is always both disruptive and integrative, it always conjoins explosion with configuration" (Malabou 2000, 140). Memory is not merely a passive medium for the freezing preservation of the past or for the dogmatic safeguarding of a particular idea of God but also contains the explosive force to detonate certain 'self-evident' understandings of God. Memory both preserves and transforms, both integrates and disintegrates the remembered. The plasticity of memory thus not only involves a moment of repair (in histology, for instance, 'plasticity' signifies the healing of wounds, and in plastic surgery the restoration or correction of form) but also makes the remembered undergo decisive decomposition by means of the explosive power of memory: Plasticity thus designates "the character of that which is plastic, that is, of that which can both receive and give form" (Malabou 2000, 140). This inherent dialectical tension offers room for the detonation of new possibilities in the past; the plasticity of memory thus both aims at preserving and exploding new fissures in the solid massifs of the past.

The spectral dilemma raised by Meillassoux seems to apply to Blumenber's interpretation of 'the death of God': Does Blumenberg's 'death of God' not manifest itself in a spectral, that is, a traumatic theological event? And furthermore: If the death of God is taken at word, how can there possibly be any hope left for humans? How can a merely remembered God possibly infuse any kind

of hope against death? Markus Hundeck has given an indication of how Blumenberg's texts may be seen as a prolegomena for *eschatology without hope* (Hundeck 2000, 75). My claim, however, is more or less the opposite: Blumenberg's thinking contains the resources for the philosophical articulation of *hope without eschatology*. Rather than ruling out hope, Blumenberg's backward-turned, 'anti-eschatological' thinking *alters* the concept of hope by transposing it into a memorial horizon: Not to be forgotten despite our inescapable death *is* the hope which *memoria* allows us to have against the inexorable corrosion of time. But how is this model of hope to be combined with the question of God?

Let us recall Meillassoux's definition of God. If we interpret the *death of God* as the *inexistence of God* (in both of Meillassoux's abovementioned understandings), then the death of God means *the effective possibility of an inexistent (contingent) God to come*. We are here confronted with the paradox of *possible futures of the past*. As already mentioned the plasticity of God is, according to Malabou, a question about time or temporality (Cf. Malabou 1996, 162). Moreover, Malabou's claim is that the God revealing himself at the same time *reveals* a new time, a new modality of coming-to-be (*une nouvelle modalité du devenir*) (Malabou 1996, 167). With the Incarnation (and the death of God) the future is no longer what it has been. By inscribing time within God, God becomes another God: A God of becoming. According to Malabou, Hegel's philosophy announces that the future, from now on, depends on the way in which the shapes and figures already present can be put back into play (*peuvent être remises en jeu*) and that this task is fulfilled by plasticity: "La plasticité accomplit sa promesse d'avenir entre la *plastification* – ou solidification – et le *pasticage* – ou explosion – du passé rigidifié" (Malabou 1996, 252). Instead of understanding 'the death of God' in its undialectical one-sidedness – namely as something irrevocably past – the plasticity of memory opens up what we (paraphrasing Kierkegaard) could call *the front door of the past*: The inexistence of God as the possibility of another past which is still to come.

Even though such an interpretation reaches beyond the scope of Blumenberg's own conjectures, it at least voices an important line of thought in Blumenberg: The past is not merely what it has been; it also resides in the plasticity

of what could have been – and is still to come; a becoming under the sign of memory.

*Die Vergangenheit ist vielleicht*
*immernoch wesentlich unentdeckt*
Nietzsche[42]

[42] F. Nietzsche: *Die Fröhliche Wissenschaft*, in :*Werke in drei Bände*, Bd. II, (Hrsg. Karl Schlechta (1956)), (Lizenzausgabe für die Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft: Darmstadt 1997), p. 62.

**Conclusion**

So which God did we think we could hope for? Blumenberg's metaphorology is also an attempt to make less obvious what we thought we knew, by again turning into possibility what 'actually' happened. As an after-metaphysical work of memory, Blumenberg's metaphorology traces out new spaces for variation in our responses to the question of God. But what do we gain from this? What systematic advantages do we take away from Blumenberg's project, and, more specifically, my interpretation of that project? Let me try to summarise what I consider to be the most important results to emerge from the present dissertation:

a) Blumenberg's metaphorology outlines a philosophical horizon against which the question of God can be thematised in an alleged 'post-metaphysical' era. God's loss of unchangeability, which Christian metaphysics had traditionally invested in this concept, is handed over to a work of *re-metaphorisation* and *re-mythicisation*. The unchangeable God of Christian metaphysics is thereby *historicised*; God is no invariable constant in history. Because God has become a story, the classical metaphysical concept of God collapses. Blumenberg's remark that "the disappearance (*der Schwund*) of metaphysics calls metaphorics back to its place" (PM 193) can thus be considered a theoretical outline for an 'after-metaphysical' approach to metaphysics; as a *work on* metaphysics in the modality of memory. Blumenberg's memory of God is formulated in opposition to those theistic theological treaties which conceive of God as unchangeable, eternal, omnipotent, omniscient etc. – in short: as *absolute*. But rather than being absolute, God is dependent; dependent on the images which humans have of him. The interesting philosophical question thereby becomes: *Which* image do we have of God? In this regard one should not only distinguish between more or less persuasive images or metaphors of God. Also the possibility that God is denied any *metaphoricity* – and is 'taken at word' as if we were dealing with a physical statement about the world (PM 22) – must be criticised. The unspoken *Leitfrage* in Blumenberg's reopening of the questions of God – which God did we think we could

b) Conceiving God as an *absolute metaphor* means that God is liberated from the metaphysical attempt to isolate him from the very process of thinking. Metaphysical attempts at absolutising God thus seem to *forget* that its presumed results and answers are not "straight answers, once and for all satisfying who is questioning" but rather the manifestation of "man's asking for orientation" (Grønkjær 2006, 1). The absolute metaphor 'God' thereby becomes the starting point for a study of how humans have rhetorically negotiated their self-understanding and brought to light their historical situation. Blumenberg's intensive work on the absolute metaphor 'God' may therefore be seen as an attempt to (indirectly) illuminate what cannot be thematised with direct immediacy: Man himself. As an absolute metaphor 'God' has *Wirklichkeit* – beyond the question of this metaphors degree of 'realism', in the conventional metaphysical sense. The fundamental *anthropological* foundation of metaphorology may give rise to suspicion, prompting the critical reader to ask: But has God ever existed? Is God nothing beyond the rhetorical constructions of humans? Blumenberg leaves this question open, or rather: He leaves the question regarding *who* left the traces of God open. Blumenberg's oeuvre can be said to be marked by methodological agnosticism; or perhaps we might prefer an expression borrowed from Emmanuel Levinas, and say that Blumenberg's oeuvre is marked by *non-indifference* to the question of God (Cf. Stoellger 2003, 160). Instead of thinking of God as an extra-historical, unchangeable reality,

c) Blumenberg's claim that humans have won more "dadurch (…) dass er Gott steigerte, um sich mit ihm zu vergleichen, als dass er ihn leugnete, um sich nicht mit ihm messen zu müssen" (BM 383) also serves as an indication of the anthropological fertility of this absolute metaphor. Blumenberg does not share the (atheistic) attempt 'to bring God to an end'; or rather, he questions what such a statement would actually imply since even the uninvolved observer is bound to ask himself: "What would still be possible after this?" (WM 633/AM 685). Again, the simple negation of something does not imply its sudden evaporation. Perhaps 'God' may even be claimed to be something "unwillkürlich Hinterlassenes" (Bedorf 2006, 403), that is, a *persistent trace* which holds semantic potentials which reaches *beyond* this idea's initial content and plausibility? That there might be certain ideas or images which cannot be *actively forgotten* may be one way of formulating God's 'absent presence': God is present because we are not able to voluntarily forget him.

d) Finally, could we possibly turn Blumenberg against himself by asking: Are we somehow disappointed by the answer given by Blumenberg? Does

What comes after the death of God? The answer given in this dissertation is: The memory of God. This answer must be understood in a double sense. Memory is both a way of being after, being in pursuit of God; but it is also the way in which God is present after his death. The plasticity of memory holds a promise that not everything will remain as it was.

* * *

**Resumé (Danish Summary)**

*The Memory of God. Hans Blumenberg's Philosophy of Religion*

Formålet med den foreliggende afhandling er dobbelt: Dels ønsker den tematisk at bidrage til den religionsfilosofiske diskussion, der kan sammenfattes i overskriften 'Guds død og (angivelige) genkomst'; dels, og mere specifikt, har intentionen været, gennem læsninger i den tyske filosof Hans Blumenbergs (1920-1996) forfatterskab, at gentænke Gud ved hjælp af erindringsbegrebet. Afhandlingens bærende tese er, at 'Guds død' ikke uden videre indebærer, at Gud er

glemt. Erindringsbegrebet muliggør således en gentænkning af Gud, der undgår det udbredte, men beklageligt misvisende alternativ mellem 'Guds død' på den ene side og 'Guds genkomst' på den anden. Herved krydses to overordnede ambitioner: Dels en eksegetisk, dels en systematisk.

Hvad angår den eksegetiske del, har ambitionen været, med udgangspunkt i Blumenbergs forfatterskab, at udarbejde et bestemt begreb om erindring. Ledetråden har her været, at erindring kan hævdes at udgøre både kerne og helhed i Blumenbergs forfatterskab. Hvad angår den systematiske del, har ambitionen været at formulere et systematisk forslag til, hvordan Gud kan tænkes i en angivelig 'efter-metafysisk' tidsalder. Sammenfattende om afhandlingen kan man derfor sige, at den udgør en bestræbelse på *igennem læsninger i Blumenbergs forfatterskab* at udarbejde et *systematisk forslag* til, hvordan Gud filosofisk set kan tænkes *ved hjælp af erindringsbegrebet*.

Afhandlingen falder overordnet i tre hoveddele. *Første del* udgør et teoretisk baggrundskapitel, der analyserer den fænomenologiske og kantianske baggrund for Blumenbergs såkaldte metaforologi. Der argumenteres for, at Blumenbergs metaforologi dels må ses som en videreførelse af en række tankemotiver fra Kant, dels som en udvidelse af en række fænomenologiske nøglebegreber. Endvidere bestemmes Blumenbergs metaforologi som et efter-metafysisk erindringsarbejde; et arbejde, der er kendetegnet ved at tænke den metafysiske tradition efter, idet der samtidig spørges til fortidens ikke-virkeliggjorte muligheder. Fortiden er ikke blot alt det, der har været, og som aldrig kommer igen; den lever også i erindringen om alt det, der kunne have været. *Anden del* griber fat om Blumenbergs omfangsrige modernitetsstudier. Tesen er her, at Blumenberg forståelse af forholdet mellem 'Guds død' og modernitetens fødsel kan sammenfattes i det (metaforologiske) spørgsmål: Hvilken Gud var det, vi troede, vi måtte håbe på? 'Guds død' føres her tilbage til en række indre-systematiske spændinger i kristendommen selv, som i sidste instans fører til det, Blumenberg kalder for 'teologisk absolutisme'. At 'Gud er død' betyder her imidlertid ikke, at Gud endegyldigt har udspillet sin rolle. Snarere betyder det, at et bestemt Gudsbegreb er brudt sammen og derfor må afløses af et andet. Den moderne tid angiver hermed ikke et radikalt brud med, men snarere en alternativ forvaltning

af en række teologiske grundpensa. *Tredje del* koncentrer sig om en mere systematisk drøftelse af erindringsbegrebets grænser og rækkevidde i forbindelse med formuleringen af et aktuelt religionsfilosofisk bud på, hvordan Gud kan tænkes. Med inspiration fra Nietzsche og Malabou foreslås det at tænke erindringen som en plastisk kraft. Plastisk betyder her to modsatrettede ting: Dels at erindringen rummer en konserverende, 'kirurgisk' dimension; dels at den rummer en disintegrerende, 'eksplosiv' dimension. Det er således erindringens plastiske kraft, der muliggør at fortiden dels kan bevares, dels 'isprænges' nye betydninger. Endvidere stilles der skarpt på Blumenbergs tese om, at Guds død betyder, at Gud alene har memorial virkelighed: Som en, der har været, er Gud overgået til et menneskeligt erindringsfællesskab. Afhandlingen drøfter (med afsæt i Hegel), om – og i givet fald hvordan – 'Gudserindring' kan forstås som en dobbelt genitiv.

På spørgsmålet om, hvad der kommer efter Gud lyder afhandlingen svar: Gudserindring. Dette svar skal forstås i sin dobbelte betydning: Erindring angiver dels en måde at være på jagt efter Gud på; dels den modalitet, hvori Gud er til stede efter sin død. Erindringens plasticitet vækker imidlertid løfter om, at fortiden ikke forbliver, hvad den har været.

**Summary (English Summary)**

*The Memory of God. Hans Blumenberg's Philosophy of Religion*

The thematic aim of the present dissertation is twofold: To contribute to the contemporary discussion within philosophy of religion, which revolves around 'the death and (alleged) return of God'; more specifically, I want to rethink God through the concept memory, drawing on selected writings from the German philosopher Hans Blumenberg's (1920-1996).

The *core hypothesis* of the dissertation is, in short, that the 'death of God' does not imply that God is forgotten. Moreover, I wish to argue that *the memory of God* makes a reconsideration of God possible: An interpretation which avoids the often cited, but unduly limiting, alternative between 'the death of God' on the one hand, and his alleged 'return' on the other. Two overall ambitions thereby intersect: Partly an exegetical, partly a systematic one. At the *exegetical* level, the ambition has been to develop a concept of memory with the assistance of Blumenberg's writings, and my claim is that memory constitutes a central theme in Blumenberg's oeuvre. At the *systematic* level, the ambition has been to formulate a proposal for how to think about God in an alleged 'after-metaphysical' age.

The dissertation has three main parts. The *first* part focuses on the theoretical background to Blumenberg's metaphorology, focussing on Kant and Husserl in particular. I argue that Blumenberg's metaphorology may be seen as a continuation of a number of Kantian motifs, not least as a development of a number of important phenomenological concepts. Moreover, Blumenberg's metaphorology is described as an 'after-metaphysical' work of memory: A work which is characterized by a re-thinking of the metaphysical by virtue of taking the non-realised possibilities of the past into account. The past is not simply what has been and never comes back; it also dwells in the memory of that which could have been. The *second* part considers Blumenberg's wide-ranging studies of modernity. My interpretation here is that Blumenberg's understanding of the relationship between 'the death of God' and the genesis of the modern age can be summarised in the (metaphorological) question: Which God did we think we could hope for? The 'death of God' is linked with the inner-systematic tensions in Christianity itself. That 'God is dead' does not mean, however, that the story of God has been played out, that it is over. Rather, it means that a particular understanding of God has collapsed and must be replaced by another. The modern age does not constitute a radical break with theology's traditional questions, but rather an alternative management of them. The *third* part focuses on a more systematic discussion of the scope of memory: Its powers and its limitations. Inspired by Nietzsche and Malabou, I suggest conceiving memory as a plastic power. Plastic here signifies two opposite things: Partly that memory contains a

surgical and preservative dimension; partly that it contains a destructive dimension. Thus, it is the plasticity of memory which, in effect, allows the past to be both preserved and detonated with new, possible meanings. Furthermore, Blumenberg's idea that 'the death of God' means that God only possesses memorial reality is taken into account: As one who has been, God is present in a human community of remembrance. By way of a reflection on Hegel, the dissertation discusses if – and if so how – 'the memory of God' can be interpreted as a double genitive.

So what comes after the death of God? According to my thesis: The memory of God. This answer must be understood in its double sense: Memory is both a way of being after, being in pursuit, of God; but also the way in which God is present after his death. The plasticity of memory holds a promise that not everything will remain as it was.

## Bibliography

Generally, the author-date reference system has been used. However, as far as reference to Blumenberg's oeuvre is concerned, the list of abbreviations mentioned below has been used.

**List of Abbreviation, Hans Blumenberg:**

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**(AAR)**: "Anthropologische Annäherung an die Aktualität der Rhetorik" in: *Wirklichkeiten in denen wir leben. Aufsätze und eine Rede*, (Reclam: Stuttgart 1981), p. 104-136.
**(AM)**: *Arbeit am Mythos,* (Suhrkamp: Frankfurt am Main 2006 [1976])
**(Aus)**: "Ausblick auf eine Theorie der Unbegrifflichkeit" in: *Ästhetische und Metaphorologische Schriften*, (Suhrkamp: Frankfurt am Main 2001 [1979])
**(BaM):** "Beobachtungen an Metaphern" in: *Archiv für Begriffsgeschichte* 15, 1971, p. 161-214.
**(BF):** *Hans Blumenberg Carl Schmitt. Briefwechsel 1971-1978*, (Suhrkamp: Frankfurt am Main 2007)
**(BG):** *Begriffe in Geschichten*, (Suhrkamp: Frankfurt am Main 1998)
**(BM):** *Beschreibung des Menschen*, (Suhrkamp: Frankfurt am Main 2006)
**(CC):** "Contemplator Caeli" in: D. Gerhart et al.: *Orbis Scriptus. Dimitrij Tschijewskij zum 70. Geburtstag*, (Hans Fink Verlag: München 1966)
**(CU):** "Einleitung" in: *Nikolaus von Cues. Die Kunst der Vermutung***.** *Auswahl aus den Schriften*, (Carl Schünemann Verlag: Bremen 1957), p. 7-69.
**(DF):** "Die erste Frage an den Menschen" in: *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, Juni 2002, Nr. 127, p. 1-2.
**(DGT):** "Das Gewand des Traums. Zur Metaphorik von Verhüllung und Enthüllung bei Freud" in: *Neue Rundschau*, 117. Jahrgang, (Edt. H.J. Balmes et al.), (S. Fischer Verlag: Frankfurt am Main 2006)
**(DLT):** *Das Lachen der Trakerin. Eine Urgeschichte der Theorie*, (Suhrkamp: Frankfurt am Main 1987)
**(DM):** *Der Mann vom Mond. Über Ernst Jünger*, (Suhrkamp: Frankfurt am Main 2007)
**(dS):** *Die Sorge geht über den Fluss*, (Suhrkamp: Franfurt am Main 1987)
**(DVP):** *Die Verführbarkeit des Philosophen*, (Suhrkamp: Frankfurt am Main 2005 [2000])
**(E):** "Einleitung" in: *Wirklichkeiten in denen wir leben* (Reclam: Stuttgart 1981), p. 3-6.
**(EC):** "Ernst Cassirer gedenkend bei Entgegenahme des Kuno-Fischer-Preises der Universität Heidelberg 1974" in: *Wirklichkeiten in denen wir Leben. Aufsätze und eine Rede*, (Reclam: Stuttgart 1981), p. 163-172.
**(EmS):** *Ein mögliches Selbstverständnis. Aus dem Nachlass,* (Reclam: Stuttgart 1997)
**(EuR):** "Epochenschwelle und Rezeption" in: Philosophische Rundshau, (6. Jahrgang, Heft 1/2), (Mohr Siebeck: Tübingen 1958), p. 94-120.
**(FOW):** "Das Fernrohr und die Ohnmacht der Vernunft" introduction to: Galileo Galilei: *Sidereus Nuncius. Nachricht von neuen Sternen* (Hrsg. und eingeleitet von Hans Blumenberg), (Suhrkamp Frankfurt am Main: 1965 [2002]), p. 7-72.
**(GB):** *Goethe zum Beispiel*, (Insel Verlag: Frankfurt am Main 1999)
**(GdK):** *Die Genesis der kopernikanischen Welt*, (Suhrkamp Frankfurt am Main: 1996 [1975])
**(GkW):** *The Genesis of the Copernican World*, (Translated by Robert M. Wallace), (MIT Press: Massachusetts 2000 [1987])

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**(H):** *Höhlenausgänge*, (Suhrkamp: Frankfurt am Main 1996 [1989])
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**(KW):** *Die kopernikanische Wende*, (Suhrkamp: Frankfurt am Main 1965)
**(L):** *Lebensthemen. Aus dem Nachlass* (Reclam Verlag: Stuttgart 1998)
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**(LM):** *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, (Translated by Robert M. Wallace), (The MIT Press: Massachusetts 1999 [1983])
**(LN):** *Die Legitimität der Neuzeit*, (Erneuerte Ausgabe), (Suhrkamp: Frankfurt am Main 1999 [1966])
**(LT):** "Lebenswelt und Technisierung unter Aspekten der Phänomenologie" in: *Wirklichkeiten in denen wir Leben. Aufsätze und eine Rede*, (Reclam: Stuttgart 1981), p. 7-54.
**(Leg)**: *Die Lesbarkeit der Welt*, (Suhrkamp: Frankfurt am Main 1986 [1981])
**(Lö):** *Löwen*, (Suhrkamp: Frankfurt am Main 2001)
**(LW):** *Lebenszeit und Weltzeit*, (Suhrkamp: Frankfurt am Main 2001 [1986])
**(MA):** "Marginalien zur theologischen Logik Rudolf Bultmanns" in: Philosophische Rundschau (2), (Tübingen 1954), p. 121-140.
**(NA):** "Nachdenklichkeit" in: Jahrbuch der Deutschen Akademie für Sprache und Dichtung, 1980, p. 57-61
**(NR):** "Notizen zum Atheismus. Aus dem Nachlass" in: *Atheismus. Neue Rundschau*, 118. Jahrgang (Heft 2), (Fischer Verlag: Frankfurt am Main 2007), p. 154-160.
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